

THE ROAR ^{of} THE RING.

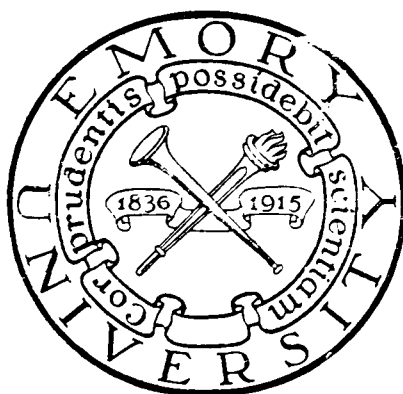
BY NAT GOULD



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THE ROAR OF THE RING

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A DEAD CERTAINTY

THE ROAR OF THE RING

BY

NAT GOULD

AUTHOR OF

'THE DOUBLE EVENT,' 'THE PACE THAT KILLS,'
ETC.

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

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THE ROAR OF THE RING

CHAPTER I

HIS FIRST RISE

‘How I made my first rise? That’s rather a long story, boys, but if you wish to know something about my career before I climbed to the top of the tree, I am quite willing to tell you.’

‘That’s right. Go on, Mark. It may encourage some of us.’

There was a larger gathering than usual in the Kelso Arms at Bathurst, although the old inn was popular, and attracted the bulk of the customers in the Western town.

The occasion of the gathering was to welcome Mark Mellish back to his native town after an absence of many years. There had been a dinner, and the general harmony prevailing after the repast was calculated to produce conversation and confidences.

As a rule, Mark Mellish kept his confidences to

himself, for in the occupation he followed he found this to his advantage. When a man returns to his native city, and finds himself once more in the midst of old friends, he may be excused for breaking through such a rule.

‘Yes, Mark, do give us an idea how you made your first rise; some of us want a rise badly these times.’

The speaker was Fletcher Norham, the landlord of the Kelso Arms.

‘You look all right, any way,’ laughed Mark. ‘I fancy you have made your pile. When I was a lad they told me Fletcher Norham was one of the warmest men in Bathurst.’

‘He was a pretty hot member in his youth,’ laughed Joe Shap.

‘Warm in more ways than one, eh, Joe?’ said Mark.

‘Rather! You ask Mrs. Norham what sort of a character he bore until she took him in hand and reformed him.’

A roar of laughter followed Joe Shap’s remark; for it was well known in Bathurst that Fletcher Norham’s wife had done a good deal towards taming him down, and still held the reins with a firm hand.

‘Come, Mark, let’s have the story,’ said Fletcher, discreetly ignoring the last speaker’s remark.

‘Such as it is, you are welcome to it,’ said Mark Mellish; ‘but I shall have to condense and cut it short, or you will be fined for keeping open after hours.’

Mark Mellish then commenced his story.

‘Most of you boys remember when I was employed at the works on the railway, and how many scrapes I got into. That sort of work did not suit me: I was not cut out for it. I hated being tied down to work for a certain number of hours each day, whether I liked it or otherwise. The clang and the bang of the workshop deafened me, and made my head ache and my heart ache too, for I thought I seemed in a fair way to be banging and clanging for the rest of my days. Where there’s a will there’s a way, however, and having the will, I soon found the way. I made up my mind to leave the railway works and go to Sydney. My father was mad about this, and my mother considered I was foolish to throw up a certain position for nothing at all.

‘I had a row with my father, which no one regretted more than myself, and he said I must go my own way, and not look to him for help. This I determined upon at the start, for every man ought to carve out his own way in the world, and not expect his parents to pull him through the battle of life.’

This remark of Mark Mellish’s was loudly applauded, at which Mark smiled, knowing well it hit home at more than one of those present.

‘I had saved a little money at the works, not much—Fletcher Norham got the bulk of it.’

Here there was another burst of laughter, and the landlord shook his fist at Mark.

‘With what money I had I went to Sydney. It

was my first visit, and didn't it open my eyes! I fancied in my ignorance that Bathurst was a large city, one of the largest in Australia. That is the disadvantage of not knocking about, and of always moving in one groove. Some of you fellows ought to be sent out into the world to learn a bit more. I soon found Bathurst could have been put in one corner of Sydney, and then you would have had to look round to find it.'

'Draw it mild, Mark.'

'Fact, I assure you. Sydney is a grand place, and Melbourne—well, it is an eye-opener to see Melbourne at Cup time. Why, lads, I have seen close upon a hundred thousand people on Flemington racecourse on Cup day, and thirty thousand people at a cricket match.

'You have no idea what it is like. When I reached Sydney the place seemed so big I was bewildered. I soon found out I was as much a new chum as the latest arrival from the Old Country. My money soon went, and I had nothing to do. One night I was wandering about killing time, when I happened to sit down on one of the seats in Hyde Park. Talk about your Park! Why Hyde Park is ten times bigger and——'

'But it is not half so well laid out, Mark.'

'You've been there, Joe, so you ought to know, and perhaps you are right. Any way, being tired, I fell asleep, and it's much I did not roll off the seat.

I was roused by some one shaking me by the arm, and heard a man say :

“ Come, young un, you ought to be moving. It's a bad sign to see a lad of your age getting into such lazy habits so early.”

‘ I rubbed my eyes and looked at the speaker. He was a tall, dark man, and his face seemed familiar to me, but where I had seen him I could not guess. I saw the expression of his face change as he looked at me. At first he evidently thought I had been drinking, as too many of the young fellows do there, but when he found out his mistake he seemed pleased.

“ What are you doing here ?” he asked.

“ Resting,” I said. “ I have nothing else to do ; I wish I had.”

“ Out of work ?”

“ I have never been in work since I came to Sydney,” I answered.

“ Where do you come from ?”

“ Bathurst. I worked in the railway workshop there, but found it too slow for me. I did not want to be there all my life, but perhaps it would have been better for me to stay.”

“ It is a foolish thing to throw up a situation when you have no prospect of obtaining another,” was his reply.

‘ I told him what I had been doing in Sydney, and eventually he took out a piece of paper, wrote on it, and handing it to me, said :

“Come round to that address in the morning.”

‘I did not tell him I had no money to get a bed that night, and when he went away I found a cosy corner in the Domain, and slept out for the first and last time.

‘In the morning I went to the address he gave me. I found it was a tobacconist’s shop in King Street. I went inside and saw him in a small room at the back.

‘He saw me and beckoned me to go in. Then he shut the door and said :

“I want someone trustworthy, and who can handle money without any of it sticking to his fingers.”

‘That was straight out, I thought, and I liked him all the better for coming to the point at once. I told him I was honest, and asked him to try me.

‘He said he had to take me on trust, as he knew nothing about me, but that he liked the cut of me.

‘I soon learned the nature of his business. He ostensibly had a tobacconist’s shop, but it was used for investing money on horse-races. Now, at that time I knew nothing at all about racing, and had not the faintest idea of what making a book meant. I have some idea now.’

His hearers smiled, and nodded, and Joe Shap said :

‘I should rather think you had, Mark!’

‘I could see from the way the business was worked that a dishonest man had ample opportunities of

taking money from his employer with very little chance of detection. A "tote," or totalisator, was worked in the back of the shop, and the first week I was there overtures were made to me by one of the clerks to "work the tote"—that was how he put it. It was done in this way: Supposing there were twenty horses in a race, and it was a five shilling "tote"; if an outsider won, there might be only one or two tickets taken on the horse, and then there would be a big dividend. It was suggested to me that we should slip in a couple of tickets on our own account, after we knew what had won. This could be easily done, but of course I declined to adopt such a dishonest course, and reported the matter to Mr. Towneley, who ran the business. He commended me and the other clerk had to go.

'From that time I was entirely trusted. I earned good wages, and learned how to make a fortune. I soon saw that laying horses was a much more profitable game than backing them, and I also saw that legitimate bookmaking would pay far better than Towneley's system. I told him so, but he said he had made enough money to live upon, and what he had got he intended to keep. I did not blame him for that: money is far easier lost than made, as most of you are aware.

'When I had been with Towneley about twelve months he gave up the business. There was an outcry in the papers about these shop totalisators, and

the bribery of the police, and heavy fines were inflicted on the proprietors. Towneley offered me the business, if I cared to take the risk, but I declined. I had a more ambitious scheme in my head than that. I determined to be the leader of the Ring in Australia if energy and perseverance could accomplish it.

‘I told Mr. Towneley my decision, and he smiled at my presumption, and asked me how much capital I had to start upon.’ I told him and he replied :

“You have behaved well to me, and I have decided to give you a lift. I will double your capital, and when you run short I will lend you more if you wish. Take my advice, however. Do not speculate over your means, and always pay promptly when you lose. To be a successful member of the Ring you must first of all establish confidence. Once men see you are honest and straightforward, you will find no lack of customers. You will discover there are black sheep even amongst backers of horses, and that all the sheep of that colour do not belong to the Ring, as many people imagine.”

‘I thanked him for his kindness, and he proved himself a real good friend to me.

‘Bookmaking is a risky, uncertain game when you first commence—in fact, it is so at all times—and requires pluck, perseverance, and a level head. Somehow, luck seemed against me when I first started, and although I held my own, I could not make a rise. The members of Tattersall’s regarded the out-

side bookmakers with but scant respect, and I was not in a position then to apply for admission to the Club.

‘However, my turn came at last, and how do you think I made my first rise?’

‘That is what we want to know,’ said Joe Shap.

‘It was when Glenloth won the Melbourne Cup.’

‘Did you back him? He was a regular outsider,’ said Fletcher Norham.

‘No, I did not back him. I never backed horses then, and I seldom do so now I can afford it. I made a bigger book than usual on that Cup, and I never wrote Glenloth’s name once. I had a “clean sheet,” and won over £2,000. That was a large sum for me, and since then I have never looked back. Last year I was acknowledged, in a speech made by the chairman of the Victoria Club in Melbourne, to be the leading bookmaker in Australia. Some people would, no doubt, say there is nothing to be proud of in holding such a position, but I am proud of it, and I shall always endeavour to make my occupation one to be regarded with respect. Very few people have a right conception of what a leader of the Ring means. They necessarily think because a man is a bookmaker he must be outside the pale of decent society. This is a libel on the honest members of the Ring,’ went on Mark Mellish with warmth.

‘I would have you know that a member of the Ring may be as respectable, and as highly respected,

as any other man. I could tell you tales about backers and owners of horses that would prove to you that these men who look down upon the members of the Ring are not so immaculate as they appear to be. But I am not going to malign any man. All I can say is that so long as I hold the position of leader of the Ring I shall endeavour to set an example of honesty and strict dealing, that may be worthily followed. Now, lads, I have briefly told you how I made my first rise, and I hope you are satisfied. I could tell you much more, but sufficient has been said to show you that honesty is the best policy, and perseverance overcometh all things.'

These homely remarks of Mark Mellish, the leviathan bookmaker, the king of the Australian Ring, were received with vociferous applause by the many friends who had gathered together to welcome him back to Bathurst.

It was well known to most of them how Mark Mellish had acted towards his parents. His father, stricken with paralysis, had been unable to work for a long time past, and his mother's health was failing fast. To the old folks at home Mark Mellish had been a dutiful son. In his prosperity he did not forget, as too many do, the guardians of his youth, the parents who had done what they could for him, and helped him along life's road. He bought a house for the old folks, and made them comfortable in it, and provided a trustworthy woman to attend to their

wants. He had done much in the past, and he meant to do more in the future.

Such is a brief outline of the early career of Mark Mellish, who has a prominent part to play in 'The Roar of the Ring.'

CHAPTER II

AN ORDER FOR BUGGIES

HIS visit to Bathurst brought back many memories to Mark Mellish. He had received a good all-round education at the public school, and had made the most of his time with his books. In his young days he was popular in the city, a smart, good-looking fellow, tall and athletic, and ready to take his part in any fun or frolic.

The Western district, more especially Bathurst, is blessed with a climate that gives health and strength with every breath inhaled, and it was the pure air of the city of the plains that had made a strong, healthy man of Mark Mellish.

When he left Bathurst he was eighteen, a susceptible age for both sexes, and Mark was no exception to the rule. He fell in love with the bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked Ada Insch, the daughter of the carriage-builder of the city. Bob Insch, as he was called, was a well-known figure out West. Insch's buggies were noted far and wide, and the squatters swore by them,

and said no man could make a buggy like Bob Insch.

Ada Insch considered herself a cut above Mark Mellish, and perhaps she was as regards worldly wealth, but for sterling qualities of heart and mind she was far beneath him. Mark Mellish, however, was one of the smartest young fellows in Bathurst, and Ada Insch could not let such a conquest slip through her hands.

She responded to Mark's advances, and they were constantly together. Bob Insch was not a stuck-up man, although he was proud of his daughter, but he gave Mark Mellish to understand he must make a name for himself before he could hope to think of Ada as other than a mere acquaintance.

'And you'll never make a rise in the railway workshops,' said Bob Insch. 'You just go to Sydney, and then you'll have a chance. A smart young fellow like you is sure to get on there.'

It was mainly owing to Bob Insch's advice that Mark Mellish decided to throw up his billet in the railway workshops and go to Sydney. Bob Insch really thought it would be better for Mark Mellish to go to Sydney, but he also had another reason for advising him to leave Bathurst.

Philip Thwaites, a well-to-do farmer in Bathurst district, and a miller and property-owner in the city, had told Bob Insch he should like to have Ada for a wife. Philip Thwaites did not bear a very good

character. He was considered fast, and his morals were loose, but he was a shrewd business man, and was making money quickly.

‘What I want is a wife,’ he said to Bob Insch, ‘and then I shall settle down; a man is none the worse for having a fling while he is single.’

‘Are you sure you can settle down?’ said Bob Insch.

‘Of course I am sure. I seldom say a thing without meaning it.’

‘And you wish to marry my daughter?’

‘If she will have me, but she is so mighty independent; and, what surprises me in a girl of her spirit, she seems infatuated with that fellow Mark Mellish. I should like to know what a girl has to expect if she marries a man like Mellish. He has no prospects in life, and he’s only a youngster.’

‘My daughter has no intention of marrying Mark Mellish,’ said Bob Insch.

‘But he has intentions; he told me so,’ said Thwaites.

‘Then it was a piece of impertinence on his part,’ said Insch angrily. ‘I shall have a word or two to say about that with him.’

‘Take my advice, and say nothing about it,’ replied Thwaites. ‘Just give him to understand there is no chance for him. I merely told you what he said to me to put you on your guard.’

Mark Mellish had not said anything of the kind

to Philip Thwaites, but the latter was not a man to care much about the truth if it suited his own ends.

Bob Insch in his heart preferred Mark Mellish to Philip Thwaites, but the miller's position attracted him.

When Mark Mellish made up his mind to try his fortune in Sydney, he extracted a promise from Ada Insch that she would be his wife. This promise was not made in a half-hearted way, because the girl was sorry to lose him, and she had more affection for him than for anyone else. She did not like the idea of his going away, and told him so, but Mark said he had his way to make in the world, and saw no prospect of getting on in Bathurst.

Ada Insch was affectionate and loving to him before he left, and her father did not interfere, as he thought Mark would soon be far enough away.

Two years after Mark Mellish left Bathurst Ada Insch married Philip Thwaites, and it did not take her long to find out she had made a mistake.

It was a sore blow to Mark Mellish when he heard the news. For a long time he was dispirited and unhappy, and went about his work in a half-hearted manner. He was, however, young, and the wound gradually healed, but he never forgot the girl he had loved as Ada Insch.

The years rolled on, and Mark Mellish still remained single. He worked hard and succeeded,

and the story he told to his old friends at the Kelso Arms was true in every respect. From time to time he heard from Bathurst, and his friend Joe Shap gave him the news, and such gossip as he thought would interest him.

In Joe Shap's letters Mark Mellish traced hints that all was not well with Philip Thwaites, and that Bob Insch had been neglectful in his business, and had gradually taken to drink. All this was painful to Mark, who respected Insch, and had not smothered his love for Ada to such an extent that it had completely died out. The more prosperous Mark Mellish became, the lower the fortunes of Bob Insch and Philip Thwaites sank.

It was no business of Mark's to interfere, but he could not resist writing to Bob Insch and asking him if it was true he had been unfortunate, and whether any assistance would be useful. 'If so,' wrote Mark, 'you know you are welcome to it, and have only to ask.'

He received no answer to his letter, and therefore did not write again. He was now in Bathurst after his many years' absence, and what a change he found there! Old faces had disappeared, the friends of his youth were now men, and even the appearance of the city had altered, like the rest of things.

Mark Mellish was staying with his father and mother, and they were delighted to have him with them, and his father loved to recall the time when he

had told Mark to do as he liked, go about his business, and make the most of it.

‘And you took me at my word, Mark,’ said the old man, ‘and you have made the most of it. You were always a good lad, and you had more sense than your father.’

And his mother would look at him and shake her head as she said :

‘I’m glad you have got on, Mark, but I don’t like your business. It seems to me it is not right. It’s gambling and horse-racing, and there is much sin and wickedness among horse-folk, I have heard.’

Mark Mellish laughed, and smothered the old lady’s fears by telling her all the wickedness in the world was not bound up in horse-racing, and that there were as many honest men on the turf as could be found in any other walk of life.

And when Mark was absent his mother would say to her husband :

‘Them racing men can’t be such a bad lot if they’re all like Mark. But they do say, Amos, as horses and wickedness run in pairs.’

‘Rubbish !’ said Amos. ‘Much you know about it ! What does horses know about wickedness ? Don’t you go for to tell Mark his calling is sinful, or else he may throw it up, and then——’

‘What then, Amos ?’

‘Where’ll you and me be

This question was unanswerable, so Mrs. Mellish remained silent.

When the Rev. Samuel Tricks, the Primitive Methodist minister, called, he gave Mrs. Mellish to understand that her son's occupation was both sinful and unlawful, and she ought to do all in her power to dissuade him from following his evil path.

'It will lead him to destruction, and I should much like to talk with him on the matter.'

'My son is an upright man,' said the old lady, 'and he respects religion. He asked me if you would accept this for the Church fund,' and she handed him a ten-pound note.

The Rev. Samuel Tricks regarded the note with awe. Ten pounds in a lump sum! It would take weeks, nay, months, to squeeze that amount out of his poor congregation. He hesitated, but the offer was too tempting. He picked up the note, folded it carefully, and putting it in his pocket, said :

'Perhaps I have been hasty, dear Mrs. Mellish. Your son is a worthy man, no matter what his calling may be, and it would ill become me to decline a gift we stand so much in need of.'

Mark Mellish smiled when he heard of this incident from his father, who, in an adjoining room, heard the conversation between the Rev. Samuel Tricks and his wife.

'I was in hopes he'd refuse it,' said Amos ; 'I could have handled it quite as well as Mr. Tricks.'

Since his return to Bathurst Mark Mellish had not seen Bob Insch. He had walked past the works several times, and with a sigh noticed the signs of neglect and lack of business. Numerous old buggies, hardly worth repairing, were standing, or propped up, in the yard. The forge had a dull fire in it, the bright red glow had died out, and the bellows seemed stiff from lack of use. Old iron, half-finished work, was littered about the floor. There was no attempt at tidiness, and Mark felt sad as he noted all these certain signs of a downward course.

In the old days the workshop was full of life and the yard stocked with brandnew buggies, which were sold as fast as Bob Insch could build them. The inside of the forge was clean and swept, and on the freshly-painted door hung prize-cards gained at various agricultural shows. The cards were there now, tattered, torn, smoke-begrimed, and Mark knew there had been no recent additions to them. Once he caught sight of Insch staggering across the yard, and Mark was shocked at the change in him.

It was some time before he summoned up courage to call on Bob Insch. He did not wish Insch to think he called to contrast their present positions. Mark was now the richer man, and Insch the poorer. He did call, however, and in an informal manner. He was passing the yard, and seeing Insch alone in the office, went in.

‘How are you?’ said Mark cheerfully. ‘I thought I’d just drop in and have a chat with you.’

Bob Insch raised his head and looked at Mark with bloodshot, watery eyes.

‘Hang me if it isn’t Mark Mellish!’ said Bob.

‘Yes, I’m Mark Mellish,’ and he held out his hand.

Bob Insch grasped it in a rough manner, and said huskily:

‘I’m glad to see you. Will you come and have something?’

Bob Insch went for his hat. Mark’s coming was an excuse to leave business and go to the nearest hotel.

‘Stay here; I wish to have a chat with you,’ said Mark.

Bob Insch sulkily acquiesced, and said:

‘Such a beastly dirty hole this! It’s much pleasanter at the Royal.’

‘How have you been getting on?’ asked Mark.

‘Badly,’ growled Insch. ‘There’s no trade in this blessed district now. These new men all go to Sydney for their buggies; they fancy a local man can’t make them good enough. It’s all rot, Mark; I can build buggies with any man, and you know it.’

‘You built the best buggies I ever saw years ago,’ said Mark.

‘And I can do it now.’

‘Then why not do it?’ said Mark.

‘What do you mean?’ grumbled Bob. ‘How can

a man build buggies without any orders? What's the use of it? Waste of time! I tell you these new men won't have anything but Sydney goods.'

'Will you build buggies as good as you did when I was here last if you get the orders?' asked Mark.

'Build 'em! I should rather think I would. You just try me.'

'I will. You can build me half a dozen and deliver them in Sydney. I know five or six men who will be only too glad to get hold of one of Bob Insch's buggies,' said Mark.

Bob Insch pulled himself together.

'You're not joking?' he asked.

'Certainly not. You can build me six buggies, and spare no expense over them. If the Sydney men are trying to knock out Bob Insch, you must show them they have no chance.'

'I will, Mark. I'll show 'em how to build buggies. Well, this is a stroke of luck! Come along, Mark, we must go and wet this,' and Insch took up his hat again.

'I have no time now,' said Mark. 'Come round to my father's to-night, and we will crack a bottle for old time's sake. When shall you start on the buggies?'

'At once,' said Bob, 'and I must see about a couple more men.'

'I want them as soon as you can build them,' said Mark. 'When I return to Sydney and tell my

friends Bob Insch of Bathurst is building buggies in his best style again, they'll be eager to get them.'

'Think so?' asked Bob.

'I am quite sure of it, and mind you do yourself credit. By-the-by, shall you want any money in advance?'

Bob Insch hesitated. He was short of money, and his credit was gone, but he did not like to confess as much to Mark Mellish.

'It is a biggish order,' said Mark, 'and I thought perhaps fifty down would not be out of the way.'

'Fifty pounds down,' gasped Bob Insch.

'Yes! will that be enough?'

'Heaps,' said Bob.

It was a long time since he had handled fifty pounds in a lump sum.

'Then I'll write you out a cheque for that amount when I go home,' said Mark, 'and mind you come round to-night and fetch it.'

'All right,' said Bob. 'You are a good sort, Mark.'

They shook hands and parted.

'I wonder if he will come,' thought Mark as he waited for the arrival of Bob Insch.

He looked at his watch. Nearly ten o'clock.

'I'll stroll round a bit,' he said to his father, who sat nodding in his chair, and left the room.

An hour later Mark Mellish returned home dis-

appointed and dejected. He had found Bob Insch at the Kelso Arms, and had taken him home, a by no means easy or congenial task.

CHAPTER III

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

THE order Bob Insch had received from Mark Mellish gave him an opportunity to talk about his business which had long been lacking. He could not resist the temptation to pay a visit to the Kelso Arms and 'blow' about his good fortune. Bob Insch, 'in his cups,' was noisy and generous, and always found a ready audience of men, nothing loath to drink at his expense.

'The luck's changed,' said Bob. 'I'll show these Sydney men how to build buggies. An order for six in one hand, that's not so bad.'

'Who gave you the order?' asked Fletcher Norham, rather doubtful of Insch's bragging, and anticipating an attempt on his part to run up a score.

'An old friend,' said Bob Insch. 'Mark Mellish.'

'That's Mark all over,' thought the landlord. 'He's given Bob the order to try and pull him together. He's a good sort, is Mark.'

'And to show he's in earnest he's promised to give me fifty down, and I'm to have the cheque to-night,' said Bob.

‘Then you had better keep your appointment,’ said Norham, who knew what a ‘sticker’ Bob Insch was when he had a glass too much.

‘There’s plenty of time,’ said Bob. ‘We’ll just have another drink round and I’ll shout.’

It was no use Fletcher Norham trying to move Bob Insch, and he told Mark Mellish so when he upbraided him for keeping Bob on the premises.

‘I have tried my best,’ said Norham, ‘and I wish he would never come near the place. I get blamed for it, and it is not my fault.’

After taking Bob Insch home, Mark Mellish determined to call next morning and give him a bit of his mind.

He found Bob in the office repentant, and at work preparing to execute the order he had received.

In answer to Mark, he said :

‘It is such a long time since I had a decent order, I could not resist the temptation of “blowing” a trifle about it. I’m sorry I did not call, Mark, but it shan’t occur again.’

‘I suppose you know I took you home last night?’ said Mark.

Bob Insch was silent. He had found himself at home in the morning, but had not the faintest idea how he got there.

‘If you start on my order like this,’ said Mark, ‘there is no telling how long you will be over it.’

There is the cheque I promised you, and mind you do not fool it away.'

Mark Mellish was returning to Sydney at the end of the week. He had not seen either Philip Thwaites or his wife, and had no intention of calling upon them. He was distressed to hear that husband and wife were constantly quarrelling, and that on more than one occasion Mrs. Thwaites had been compelled to apply to the magistrates for protection from her husband's violence.

'She's suffered for her mistake,' thought Mark, 'and she had much better have kept her promise to me.'

Mark Mellish had been to Kelso, and was returning home rather late. He walked along the road, over the Macquarie Bridge, and had just crossed the river, when he heard a horse galloping along the road, behind him, at a furious pace.

'Running away,' thought Mark, 'and it's pitch dark. I'm afraid there's no chance of stopping it.'

He stepped to the side of the road, waiting to see if he could render any assistance.

Nearer and nearer came the horse, and Mark knew it was going at a great pace.

'He's got a clear course at any rate,' thought Mark, 'and there's not much danger of meeting vehicles at this time of night. How dark it is! I wish I could see him.'

He peered into the darkness, but saw nothing, and

the runaway was still coming on and nearing the bridge.

Mark heard a man shouting and swearing, and thought he recognised the voice, but failed to remember where he had heard it. The horse was close to the bridge now, and in another moment would be across it and galloping past him.

Then Mark heard a crash. There was a shrill terrible cry, either from horse or rider, or both, and then a splash in the river.

‘Great heavens! he’s smashed the rails and they have both gone over,’ thought Mark, horrified at the sudden accident. ‘What am I to do?’

He ran on to the bridge and peered through the darkness into the river below.

He saw nothing, but he fancied he heard the horse struggling.

He shouted, but received no answer.

Mark knew it was hopeless for him to do anything alone, so he set off towards Bathurst to get assistance. As he reached the outskirts of the town he met a policeman, and told him what had happened.

‘Will you go on to the police-station, Mr. Mellish, and I’ll run down to the bridge. Tell them to bring a couple of ropes, the ambulance, and lights.’

Mark went on and procured assistance, while the policeman hurried to the scene of the accident. There were not many people about in the streets, but as Mark and the policemen passed the Kelso Arms,

they saw Fletcher Norham and Joe Shap. Hurriedly explaining to them what had happened, the landlord and Shap went with them.

They scrambled down the bank to the river-side, and threw the light from the lanterns on to the water. For some minutes they could see nothing.

‘The moon will be up presently,’ said Shap; and no sooner had he spoken than it gradually became clearer.

‘There’s the horse,’ said Mark. ‘Hold your lantern still; the light is dead on it.’

The water wasn’t deep, and the form of the horse was now clearly visible.

‘I’ll wade in,’ said Joe Shap, divesting himself of some of his clothes, and, taking a rope in his hand, he walked into the river.

‘Be careful, Joe. The horse may be alive,’ said one of the constables.

‘He’s dead enough,’ replied Joe, ‘or he’d be struggling.’ He reached the horse, and tied the rope round its neck. ‘Throw the other rope,’ he shouted; and as it was hurled over to him he caught it dexterously.

Having made this rope fast to one of the hind-legs of the horse, he came back to the bank.

They hauled at the ropes, and soon had the horse at the bank-side. The sergeant of police made a careful examination of it. Fletcher Norham uttered an exclamation of surprise, and said :

‘That’s Mr. Verney’s horse.’

‘What! John Verney’s?’ said Mark.

‘Yes,’ replied Norham.

John Verney was a rich, eccentric man, a magistrate for Bathurst district, and lived at a lonely house about two miles the other side of Kelso.

‘So it is,’ said the sergeant; ‘and Mr. Verney never allowed anyone to ride that horse except himself. He must have been on it when the accident happened.’

‘Strange the horse should have bolted with him,’ said Joe Shap.

‘You are sure the horse was running away?’ said the sergeant to Mark Mellish.

‘I am certain of it,’ replied Mark. ‘There can be no mistake about it.’

‘It is very strange,’ muttered the sergeant. ‘The horse and rider understood each other so well. That horse would follow him about like a dog. Search for the body,’ he said aloud to the constables.

The moon was now shining bright and clear, and there was no difficulty in searching the river. They went along the banks, but could see nothing, and at last the sergeant said :

‘We must drag the river in the morning. It is useless to try and find him now.’

‘Perhaps it is not Mr. Verney,’ said Joe Shap.

‘I hope not,’ said the sergeant. ‘I am going up to The Fells. Will you walk with me, Mr. Mellish?’

Mark said he would do so, and Sergeant Peasley said, 'You had better come too, Racks.'

The two policemen and Mark Mellish set off to walk to The Fells. On arriving at the house Sergeant Peasley noticed that there was a light burning in Mr. Verney's study. He had been to The Fells several times on business, and knew the run of the house. The front door was wide open.

'That's strange,' said Sergeant Peasley, as he rang the bell.

There was no response to the summons.

'How many servants does he keep?' asked Mark.

'No women-servants,' said the sergeant. 'He will not have a woman about the place. They do say his wife ran away from him a month after they were married, and he has been a woman-hater ever since.'

He pulled the bell again, and this time there was a shuffling sound in the house, and presently a man appeared rubbing his eyes and yawning. The man came along grumbling to himself, and when he saw the policemen standing in the doorway he started back and turned pale.

'You here, sergeant! What's the matter?' he exclaimed.

'That's what we have come to find out,' said Sergeant Peasley.

'What do you mean?'

'Where is Mr. Verney?'

‘He’s in bed, I expect. I left him in his study when I locked up for the night,’ said Charles Oatlands, Mr. Verney’s servant.

‘Then you locked up before you went to bed?’

‘Yes.’

‘The front door was wide open when we arrived,’ said Sergeant Peasley.

Charles Oatlands did not look surprised as he said :

‘Then Mr. Verney must have gone out after I locked up. Sometimes he goes round to the stables to see Hereward—that’s his favourite horse—and as likely as not he leaves the door open when he comes in again. He has done it before.’

‘Will you see if Mr. Verney is in his room?’ said Sergeant Peasley.

Charles Oatlands went upstairs, and in a few moments returned and said :

‘He has not been to bed. He must have slept in the study in his chair.’

‘Please see if he is in the study,’ said Sergeant Peasley.

Charles Oatlands opened the study door quietly and looked in. He saw Mr. Verney in his chair asleep, and closing the door softly, returned to the constables.

‘He is asleep in his study,’ said Oatlands. ‘I dare not awake him. It would be as much as my place is worth.’

‘I’ll go round to the stables, and wait until he is awake. Which stable is Hereward in?’

‘I’ll show you,’ said Charles Oatlands. And then he hesitated, and looked doubtfully at the sergeant.

‘Well?’ said Sergeant Peasley inquiringly.

‘Mr. Verney does not care for strangers going to Hereward’s box,’ said Oatlands.

‘He won’t mind me going,’ said Sergeant Peasley.

‘Will you take the responsibility?’ asked Oatlands.

‘Yes.’

Charles Oatlands led the way to the rear of the house. Mark Mellish wondered why Sergeant Peasley did not explain the reason of their visit, or that Oatlands did not ask.

‘That’s the box,’ said Oatlands, ‘but the door is locked.’

Sergeant Peasley lifted the latch, and, to the consternation of Charles Oatlands, pushed the door wide open.

‘It is not locked,’ said Sergeant Peasley.

Charles Oatlands was looking into the vacant box in amazement. Hereward was not there. Sergeant Peasley watched him closely, and thought:

‘His surprise is genuine, at any rate. Whatever has happened, he knows nothing about it. Where is the horse?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know,’ gasped Oatlands. ‘There’ll be a terrible row about it. We shall all have to clear out.’

‘Where is the groom?’

'He sleeps over there,' said Oatlands, pointing to a small cottage. 'He's married.'

'Call him,' said the sergeant.

Charles Oatlands knocked at the door, which was shortly afterwards opened, and Fred Penistone, the groom, appeared.

'What's the row?' he asked.

'Row enough there will be,' said Oatlands. 'Hereward is missing.'

The groom could hardly believe this.

'Hereward missing!' he exclaimed. Then seeing the constables, he asked, 'Has he been stolen?'

'Hereward has been stolen, and I have found him,' said Sergeant Peasley.

'That's lucky,' said the groom.

'The horse is dead. The man who stole him could not control him. We found the horse dead in the river. Mr. Mellish heard the horse and rider crash into the bridge, and then fall into the Macquarie.'

Fred Penistone looked the picture of misery. He knew what this meant to him, and he had not long been married. He knew Mr. Verney would never forgive him for not watching more carefully over the horse.

'Did you hear any one about last night?' asked the sergeant.

'No,' said the groom. 'I never heard anything.'

'Nor I,' said Charles Oatlands.

'You did not hear Mr. Verney open the door, and you did not hear him go to the stables?'

'No,' replied both men.

Sergeant Peasley walked back to the house, followed by the others.

'See if Mr. Verney is awake,' he said to Oatlands, who again cautiously opened the door of the study.

'He is still asleep,' he said, as he drew back.

Sergeant Peasley went towards the study, and Oatlands said :

'I should not advise you to rouse him.'

'Mr. Verney !' said Sergeant Peasley.

No answer.

'Mr. Verney !' he said in a louder tone.

Still no answer.

Sergeant Peasley looked earnestly at the sleeping man, and then went into the room. The others stood at the door watching him, dreading they knew not what.

The sergeant slowly approached Mr. Verney, who sat perfectly still, with his head leaning forward, his chin on his chest.

'Mr. Verney !' he said, stooping down and peering into his face.

The others now came into the room, and the sergeant said :

'Stand back, please. Mr. Verney is dead !'

CHAPTER IV

THE RING OF SOLID GOLD

JOHN VERNEY was dead, and to all appearances he had died quietly in his chair as he slept.

This was the first impression Sergeant Peasley had when he made the discovery. He knew, however, that this might not be the case, and determined to make a careful examination of the room and the body.

Mark Mellish was horrified at the discovery, and the two servants were distracted, for John Verney had been a good master to them, despite his eccentricities.

Sergeant Peasley ordered them all out of the room, and told Constable Racks to stand at the door. As Mark Mellish was going out Peasley said :

‘You can remain if you wish. You may be of assistance.’

Mark turned back, and he and Peasley were left alone in the room.

‘This is a mysterious business,’ said Peasley, when the door was shut, and they could not be overheard.

Mark Mellish was looking closely at John Verney, and said :

‘I don’t think he died a natural death.’

‘What makes you think so?’ asked Sergeant Peasley.

Mark Mellish pointed to the floor. At the dead

man's feet there was a dark stain caused by a large quantity of blood.

Peasley knelt down on the floor, and made a careful examination. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of surprise, mingled with horror. John Verney's hands were hanging down and they were almost severed at the wrists.

He called Mark Mellish's attention to the terrible sight.

'He must have bled to death,' said Mark; 'but how did it happen?'

'That we must try and discover,' said Peasley.

They searched the room but found no weapon.

'There has been no struggle,' said the sergeant.

'Not from the appearance of the room,' said Mark.

John Verney's chair faced his desk, which was of curious construction. It seemed to be a combination of desk and safe, the iron safe forming part of the support for the desk. It was open, and papers were littered about, but the safe was closed, and there appeared to be no means of opening it.

Sergeant Peasley examined it carefully, and found blood stains all along the edge of the safe and desk.

'He seems to have been writing at his desk when he met with his death,' said the sergeant.

'But how were his wrists cut in such a terrible way?' asked Mark.

'It is impossible to say. It could scarcely have

been an accident. Hallo !' he exclaimed, 'this side of the safe is open,' and he pulled the door back.

Inside were several account books, and four sovereigns scattered on the bottom.

'Robbery ; that's what it is,' said Sergeant Peasley, 'and the thief stole the horse to get away with his spoil. He could not have known much about the place, or he would not have taken Hereward. We shall find his body in the river, and then we shall discover perhaps a motive for the crime.'

'There must have been a struggle,' said Mark, 'or his wrists would not have been cut.'

'It is a level cut,' said the sergeant. 'It looks as though there had been a knife, blade upward, on the desk, and both wrists fell on it. See, Mr. Mellish, there are blood-marks all along this desk, and the blotting-paper is soaked with blood.'

'His arms were hanging straight down,' replied Mark.

'No ; his hands rested on his legs,' said Peasley.

'It is most extraordinary,' replied Mark. 'It does not look like murder. There must have been an accident of some kind.'

'What about the runaway horse ?' said the sergeant. 'How do you account for that ?'

Mark had no answer to this question.

Leaving Constable Racks in charge of The Fells, Sergeant Peasley and Mark Mellish returned to Bathurst.

The news of the discovery at The Fells was soon made public, and caused an immense sensation. All kinds of wild rumours were afloat. It was reported that John Verney had been found with his head almost severed from his body; that he had been stabbed to the heart; and also another rumour that his wrists had been cut during a struggle with his assailant.

The Macquarie river was dragged, but no body was found, nor any trace of the man who was supposed to have committed the crime and stolen the horse.

An inquest was held, and Dr. Selhurst, who had made a post-mortem on the body of John Verney, gave evidence of a rather strange character. He was of opinion John Verney's death was due to a sudden stoppage of the action of the heart; in other words, the deceased magistrate had suffered from heart disease for some time past, and a sudden death was not to be wondered at in his case. The death might have been caused through a sudden shock. Dr. Selhurst's theory as to the severed wrists was peculiar. He was of opinion that the gashes had not been caused by a cut from a knife in the hand of a probable assailant, but that Mr. Verney had fallen forward while standing upright, and in trying to steady himself had cut his wrists with some sharp instrument lying on his desk, and had then sunk into his chair, and his hands had fallen on to his knees in the position they were in when he was found dead.

The coroner asked Dr. Selhurst several questions, amongst others the following :

‘What is your reason for saying the wrists were not cut by a knife in the hand of a probable assailant ?’

‘Because the wrists are cut exactly level, and the cuts are perfectly clean, not jagged. This is what I mean,’ said Dr. Selhurst, taking out his pocket-knife and opening it.

He placed the knife on the table in front of him, the sharp side of the blade uppermost. Then he stood up and said :

‘If Mr. Verney was standing up, facing his desk, and there was a sharp instrument on that desk, like this knife, only larger, and he suddenly swayed forward, his wrists would come on the blade, so.’

And Dr. Selhurst illustrated what he meant so effectually by leaning forward and placing his wrists on the upturned blade of the knife, that several members of the jury shuddered.

‘Then, if my theory be correct,’ went on Dr. Selhurst, ‘he swayed backwards into his chair and his hands dropped on to his knees.’ This he also illustrated in person.

‘No trace of any weapon has been found,’ said the coroner.

‘But there were blood marks on the desk, and the blotting-paper was saturated,’ said Dr. Selhurst.

‘Then there is the fact of the horse being stolen,’ said the coroner.

‘The sudden appearance of a man in the house would cause such a shock to Mr. Verney as I have described,’ replied Dr. Selhurst.

‘Then you are not inclined to think Mr. Verney was attacked?’

‘No.’

‘And that his death was due to heart disease?’

‘Yes; heart disease was the primary cause.’

‘Then according to your theory, it is not a case of murder?’

‘Not directly.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘I mean that any man who gave Mr. Verney the shock that caused his death is morally responsible for his sudden end, although he may not have actually attacked him—murdered him,’ said Dr. Selhurst.

‘Thank you, Dr. Selhurst; that will do,’ said the coroner.

‘May I ask Dr. Selhurst a question?’ said one of the jury.

‘Certainly,’ replied the coroner.

‘Did you examine the desk, doctor?’ asked the juryman.

‘Yes; minutely,’ said Dr. Selhurst. ‘It is of peculiar construction, and I should imagine has been made to order from the design of Mr. Verney. I think the desk ought to be taken to pieces and thoroughly examined.’

‘Why are you of that opinion?’ asked the juryman.

‘Because there may be some secret connected with it which may account for my theory as to how Mr. Verney’s wrists were severed,’ said Dr. Selhurst.

‘You mean there may be some sharp instrument concealed in it as a protection against burglars, and upon which Mr. Verney may have cut himself?’

‘Precisely so,’ said Dr. Selhurst. ‘I have known a safe made with a spring, to which was attached a small keen blade that would cut the hand of anyone opening the safe who did not know the secret.’

‘I think, Mr. Coroner, the desk should be thoroughly overhauled,’ said the jurymen.

‘Mr. Verney’s nephew is here,’ said the coroner. ‘Perhaps he would be willing for this to be done.’

Herbert Verney was John Verney’s nephew, and heir to the property, and he was much shocked at his uncle’s death. He was a prepossessing, manly young fellow, about four-and-twenty, and much sympathy was expressed for him.

In answer to the coroner, Herbert Verney said he had no objection to his uncle’s desk being thoroughly overhauled, but he should not care to have it destroyed, because he wished to keep it.

The coroner said there was no necessity to adjourn the inquest for this purpose. He thought the jury had quite sufficient evidence to go upon to return a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown—in other words, to return an open verdict, and leave the matter in the hands of the police.

Much as he respected Dr. Selhurst's opinion, he was bound to tell the jury it was merely a theory the doctor had advanced, and they must not go upon theory but upon fact. Dr. Selhurst had stated that the deceased suffered from heart disease. That made no difference in this case if the late Mr. Verney had been attacked, and his death caused thereby. They had the evidence of Mr. Mark Mellish, who heard the runaway horse crash into the bridge, and also heard a man's cry.

'Pardon my interruption,' said Mark. 'I said I heard a cry, but it was so shrill and peculiar it might have been uttered by a horse or a man.'

'You said you heard a man shouting and swearing,' said the coroner.

'Yes ; but that was before the accident. The man might not have been on the horse.'

The coroner smiled as he said :

'That is a highly improbable supposition. If the man had not been on the horse, you would have met him on the bridge.'

Continuing his summing up, the coroner said there was also the evidence of Sergeant Peasley, and the fact, as stated by him, that the front door of The Fells was open, and the stable door, where Mr. Verney kept his favourite horse, was unlocked. He had no doubt himself as to what the verdict should be, but he was in the hands of the jury, and confidently left the matter to them.

The jury were some considerable time in arriving at a decision, but they eventually agreed, and returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.

‘I quite agree with your verdict, gentlemen,’ said the coroner, ‘and thank you for your services. The further investigation into this most painful case now devolves upon the police.’

There was not much surprise at the verdict in Bathurst, although Dr. Selhurst was strongly of opinion that no actual violence had been committed.

Herbert Verney was determined to do everything in his power to bring the man, or men, who had caused his uncle’s death to justice. The desk at The Fells was examined by several skilful men, but no trace of any concealed knife or sharp instrument could be found. One side of the desk, with a front like a safe, was to all appearances a dummy, made merely for the purpose of deceiving thieves.

Mark Mellish knew Herbert Verney, who was fond of racing, and had several horses in training at Randwick.

They met after the inquest, and Herbert Verney said to him :

‘Tell me your opinion, Mark. Do you think there was any foul play?’

‘Yes,’ replied Mark, ‘I do ; everything points to it.’

‘What was the motive?’

‘Robbery.’

‘Why do you think so?’

‘Because one part of the safe under the desk, that on the left-hand side, was open, and there were four sovereigns on the floor of it. They had, in my opinion, been dropped by the thief as he took his booty away.’

‘You are right, Mark,’ said Herbert Verney. ‘Will you do me a favour?’

‘Certainly,’ said Mark.

‘The police do not know a robbery was committed. They are not aware that anything was stolen, although they may suspect it. Promise me you will help me, and keep what I am about to tell you to yourself.’

‘I will,’ said Mark.

‘If the police knew a robbery was committed, it would be made public in the papers, and the thief thus be warned. If nothing is said about it, the murderer will feel secure,’ said Herbert Verney.

‘That is perfectly true,’ said Mark.

‘There was five hundred pounds in that safe,’ said Herbert, ‘and a ring of solid gold. The ring was made from gold obtained many years ago on one of the old goldfields, not many miles from Bathurst. My uncle owned the mine where it was found, and on one occasion when he showed me the ring, he said: “Look well at it, Herbert lad, and let it teach you a lesson. That was my wife’s wedding-ring. She left me after we had been married a month, and returned that ring to me. You cannot bind a woman’s heart with a ring of gold.”’

‘I have gone carefully through my uncle’s papers, and from them I gather that he always kept five hundred pounds and that ring in the safe on the left-hand side under his desk. He was somewhat eccentric, as you know, and why he kept the money and ring there I am not aware. He, no doubt, had some good reason for it. The man who took that money and caused my uncle’s death is not in the Macquarie river. I do not believe he was on Hereward when he fell over the bridge, and I will tell you why I hold that opinion.’

CHAPTER V

A PAIR OF BRIGHT EYES

‘THE reason I think there was no one on Hereward when he crashed over the bridge into the river,’ said Herbert Verney, ‘is because it was almost impossible for anyone to mount him. I have tried to do so on several occasions, and only once succeeded, and you know I am a very fair horseman.’

‘My opinion is that the man knew my uncle, and probably visited him for the purpose of obtaining money from him, perhaps a loan. He was in the habit of lending a good deal of money, and I am afraid in many cases it was never returned.’

‘Mind you, what I am now saying is merely supposition, and may be wide of the mark. You may think, if my surmise be correct, why did the man

select Hereward to get away upon? My answer is that, terrified at what he had done, the man who attacked my uncle would not be particular as to which horse he took. The stable door was opened, and the key of that door was on the ring my uncle carried about with him. The murderer—for such I shall call him—opened the safe with one of the keys, and found the key of the stable on the same bunch.

‘He saddled Hereward—the horse would let him do that—and then when he tried to mount he bolted. The man did not try to mount in the stable-yard, or someone would have heard him. He must have led the horse on to the road, and when attempting to mount he probably lost his temper, ill-used Hereward, and frightened the horse so that he got away, and galloped down the road. What do you think of it, Mark?’

‘Probably you are correct,’ said Mark. ‘If there had been a man on Hereward’s back when he went over the bridge, he would have been killed, and his body recovered. The river has been well dragged, and nothing has been found. The police, however, still think there must have been someone on the horse at the time of the accident.’

‘They are at liberty to have their own opinion and think what they like, and so are we,’ replied Herbert Verney.

The funeral of John Verney was largely attended, and Mark Mellish remained in Bathurst for it.

Herbert Verney took up his residence at The Fells for a time, and kept all the hands on who were there in his uncle's time.

The day before Mark Mellish left Bathurst for Sydney he met Ada Thwaites in William Street and stopped to speak to her. He noticed how pale and ill she looked, and could not help remarking upon her appearance.

Ada Thwaites was confused at meeting him, but he soon put her at her ease.

She was, however, evidently nervous, and looked round from time to time as though fearful of being seen.

Mark noticed this, and said rather bitterly :

‘Are you ashamed of being seen with me?’

‘No, no, Mark, you know I am not,’ she said hurriedly. ‘It is very kind of you to speak to me at all after the way I treated you.’

‘Never mind that,’ said Mark. ‘It cannot be helped now, and it is years since. Is there anything I can do for you?’

Mrs. Thwaites hesitated. She evidently did not like to ask a favour of him.

Mark saw her hesitation, and said :

‘Do not be afraid to ask anything of me ; I shall be only too pleased to help you.’

‘No, there is nothing now,’ she said hesitatingly ; ‘but I may have need of your assistance at some future time.’

‘Then do not forget me when that time comes,’ said Mark.

‘I will not,’ she said. ‘And you promise to help me under any circumstances?’

‘Yes,’ said Mark. ‘I will help you.’

They were standing at the corner of another street, and did not see Philip Thwaites coming until he was close to them. When Mrs. Thwaites saw her husband she turned pale, and a look of fear came into her eyes. Mark saw it, and raged against Philip Thwaites as the cause, but he wisely kept his temper, and said :

‘How are you, Mr. Thwaites? I am leaving Bathurst to-morrow, and I am glad to have met you before I go.’

He put out his hand, and Philip Thwaites took it sullenly. Much to his wife’s relief, he said nothing to her.

‘So you leave to-morrow?’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘Yes, I must return to Sydney,’ said Mark. ‘Business must be attended to.’

‘I hear you have made a heap of money at book-making,’ said Philip.

‘I have done very well,’ replied Mark.

‘I’ve a good mind to try my hand at it,’ said Thwaites.

‘You might do worse,’ replied Mark.

‘There’s nothing to be made here,’ said Thwaites.

‘I mortgaged all my property years ago. I sup-

pose it will be young Verney's now ; his uncle advanced me the money.'

'From what I know of Herbert Verney, he is not the man to be hard on anyone,' said Mark.

'But I have paid no interest for the last five or six years,' said Thwaites, with an attempt at a laugh.

'I'm sorry for that,' said Mark.

'I must turn my hand to something,' said Thwaites, 'and your game seems as good as any.'

'You will want capital to start with,' said Mark.

'I can manage to raise enough for that,' said Philip Thwaites. 'I'm not quite stone-broke yet.'

'Good-bye,' said Ada Thwaites. 'I must go ; I have some shopping to do.'

She held out her hand, and Mark gave it a gentle encouraging pressure which she understood and appreciated.

Philip Thwaites took no notice of his wife as she walked away, but when she was out of earshot he said to Mark :

'I fancy she thinks it would have been better for her had she married you instead of me.'

Mark Mellish felt uncomfortable, but he said with a forced laugh :

'That's all nonsense. She is your wife, and I do not suppose for one moment she ever gives a thought to me.'

Philip Thwaites laughed harshly, and said :

'We don't agree very well. She's too high and

mighty for me, but I think I have managed to tame her. She's not half so quarrelsome as she used to be.'

Mark Mellish felt inclined to knock the speaker down. The sight of Ada Thwaites suffering as her face plainly showed she did, made his blood boil. He felt it would be better to change the subject, so he said :

'That was a terribly sudden affair at The Fells.'

Philip Thwaites, who had been looking down the street, turned quickly round, and said :

'You mean old Verney's death?'

'Yes,' said Mark.

'I should think Dr. Selhurst is right,' said Philip Thwaites. 'He must have died suddenly from heart disease.'

'That is not my opinion,' said Mark.

'What is your opinion?'

'I think there was foul play.'

Philip Thwaites laughed, and his laugh jarred upon Mark Mellish.

'There is no clue, at all events,' he said. 'I think the coroner was wrong to direct the jury as he did. There was no evidence that it was wilful murder; all the evidence was contrary to such a supposition.'

'If you had seen him as I saw him,' said Mark, 'you would have no doubt about the matter.'

'But you see I did not,' snapped Philip Thwaites, 'so I only had the evidence to go upon, and I can't see much in that pointing to murder.'

‘Then you think John Verney died a natural death?’ said Mark.

‘Of course I do. What else am I to think after Dr. Selhurst’s evidence?’

‘Time will show,’ replied Mark, ‘and I think you will find you are wrong.’

‘He’s dead and buried, and what’s done can’t be undone,’ said Philip Thwaites callously.

As the two men stood talking a girl about eighteen years of age came up and said to Philip Thwaites :

‘Father, someone is at our house waiting to see you. He said he would remain until you returned.’

‘Who is it?’

‘Young Mr. Verney.’

Philip Thwaites started, and said hurriedly to Mark :

‘I expect he’s come about the mortgage. He’s lost no time. Olive, this is Mr. Mellish.’

Mark Mellish shook hands with the girl, and thought :

‘She is the image of her mother when I first knew her.’

Philip Thwaites hastily bid Mark Mellish good-day, and said to Olive :

‘You may as well walk back with me.’

The girl looked wistfully at Mark, and it cut him to the quick to see traces of sadness on her bright young face. He sighed as he watched them walk away, and thought :

‘It is for her daughter’s sake she asked me to help her if ever she needed it.’

When Philip Thwaites reached home he found Herbert Verney waiting for him. Olive Thwaites, however, appeared to attract his attention, and so abstracted was he that Philip Thwaites said :

‘You wished to see me, Mr. Verney, so my daughter says.’

‘Yes, I wish to see you,’ he replied.

Olive left the room, and Philip Thwaites said :

‘I suppose you have come about the mortgage.’

‘Yes,’ said Herbert Verney.

‘Your uncle held the deeds. There is a considerable amount of interest due, but the property is valuable, and if sold will more than cover everything, and leave me a balance.’

‘But I don’t want to sell it. That is what I have come to see you about,’ said Herbert Verney.

Philip Thwaites opened his eyes.

‘Then what the deuce has he come for?’ he thought.

‘The fact of the matter is, I hear you have had rather a rough time of it, and I don’t wish to press you hard. If you think you can pay off the mortgage and interest, I am willing to wait,’ said Herbert Verney.

‘I do not see much prospect of doing that at present,’ replied Philip Thwaites; ‘but if you give me time, I will do my best.’

‘That settles it,’ said Herbert Verney. ‘I thought I would call and put you at your ease about it.’

To say Philip Thwaites was astonished would be to express in too mild a term the actual state of his feelings. He was ‘knocked all of a heap’; that was the way he put it. Such a stroke of luck had not come his way for many days. He was actually civil to his wife when she came home, and on his explaining what had happened, Ada Thwaites was as much surprised as her husband.

When Herbert Verney left Thwaites’s house he thought :

‘What a soft-hearted fool I am! I went there to tell him I must call in the mortgage, and here I have gone and given him a chance to pay, and take his time about it. That is what it practically amounts to. And it is all on account of a pair of bright eyes, owned by a young lady whose acquaintance I made half an hour ago. It was a sudden inspiration, I suppose. When she opened the door, my stony-hearted resolves all melted into thin air. What wonderful eyes she has! and such hair, pure nut-brown, upon my word it is! And she is the daughter of Philip Thwaites. It is hardly possible to believe it. Olive. Yes, that’s her name—Olive. I believe Mary Ann or Matilda Jane would have passed muster, owned by such a charming girl. But Olive! Why, it smacks of romance at once. I must see more of Olive.’

It was quite evident from Herbert Verney’s thoughts

that Olive Thwaites had made a deep and lasting impression upon him. He had set out from The Fells determined to let Philip Thwaites know that if his uncle allowed the interest on certain mortgages to stand over for five years, he was not likely to do the same thing.

‘I’ll soon settle Mr. Philip Thwaites,’ he had said to himself, and had knocked at the door filled with a determination to have his rights and brook no nonsense. And when the door opened, and Olive Thwaites looked him in the face, with her clear blue eyes he had stood speechless until she asked, in a quiet tone of voice :

‘Whom do you wish to see?’

‘Mr. Thwaites,’ he had replied quite humbly, as though soliciting a favour.

Then she had asked him in, and gone in search of her father, and Herbert Verney had sat down all in a flutter of excitement, wondering what had come over him.

Olive Thwaites would have been blind had she not seen the evident look of admiration in Herbert Verney’s face. She was not at all displeased to have attracted the attention of such a handsome young man. She did not see many young men ; her mother took care of that. She thought a good deal about Herbert Verney, and wondered if she would meet him again. He seemed to have brought something fresh into her life, given her a new joy in living.

‘What do you think Herbert Verney called about?’ said Philip Thwaites to his wife.

“About the mortgage, I suppose,” she said with a sigh.

‘Yes ; but he did not say what I expected. I could hardly believe it when he said he would give me any reasonable time if I thought I could pay it off. I cannot think what has come over the fellow. I expected he would give notice to call it in at once.’

Olive Thwaites’ heart beat fast. Why had Herbert Verney done this ? was the question she asked herself.

Mrs. Thwaites could not understand it, but she was thankful for a respite. In the long run such leniency might not do them much good, but at any rate it staved off the evil day. She had no faith in her husband mending his ways ; on the contrary, she detected signs that he was going from bad to worse.

‘I wonder what reason Mr. Verney had for being so generous about the mortgage,’ she said, half to herself and half to Olive, when they were alone.

Olive made no reply, but she thought :

‘Perhaps I am the reason. Who knows ?’

CHAPTER VI

A PROPOSAL TO MARK

MARK MELLISH lived in a small but comfortable house at Randwick, and had a place of business in Pitt Street, Sydney, not far from Tattersall’s Club.

Mark was a bachelor, and had a housekeeper to look after his domestic affairs. The bookmaker held a prominent position in Sydney, and was well-known and respected by many men in various walks of life. The ramifications of his business extended all over Australasia, and it was surprising, quite a revelation, in fact, to read the list of names on his books.

Mark Mellish had seen a good deal of all sorts of human nature since he became a member of the Ring. Few men see more of the grasping side of their fellows than bookmakers. A desire to make money rapidly, and without working for it, is the main cause of speculation, not alone on the turf, but in other walks of life.

To the man who is plodding along, earning three or four pounds a week, the prospect of making as much in a few hours as he can gain in a year is alluring. A couple of hundred pounds down looks far more than the same amount doled out at the rate of four pounds a week. The risk attached to any form of speculation makes it more attractive. There is no more harm in speculating on a horse race than in dabbling in stocks and shares. Racing men have unlimited confidence in each other's integrity. Thousands upon thousands of pounds are lost and won in the Ring, and no formality of any kind is connected with the transaction. A backer takes a thousand to a hundred about a horse and the book-

maker enters the wager in his volume. After the race he pays if he loses and receives if he wins. There is mutual confidence and trust between book-maker and backer. No receipts are necessary, everything is left to the honour of the parties. In what other business does a similar system prevail?

Mark Mellish's reputation as an honourable member of the Ring was high. There was no question of dispute with him, and his payments were made with commendable punctuality. If a backer was hard hit and asked for time on settling-day, he seldom met with a refusal from Mark Mellish.

The amount of money Mark gave away in the course of a year would have been considered an ample income by many people.

Trainers in distress, after a run of bad luck, and when owners fought shy of them and took their horses away, came to Mark Mellish and never went away empty-handed.

'Just a hundred to tide over difficulties, Mr. Mellish.' That was how they put it, and Mark wrote out a cheque for the amount, and seldom took an acknowledgment.

There was a trainer at Randwick, named Samuel Sandycroft, who was at the top of the tree in his business.

There was a time when Sam Sandycroft was down on his luck. The trainer was an independent man,

and not given to asking help from anyone. He lived not very far from Mark Mellish, and the bookmaker, who knew the position of most men on the turf, soon found out that Sam Sandycroft was in sore straits. Mark knew more about the trainer than Sandycroft expected.

This was Mark's way of proffering help: he called at the trainer's house, on his way to Sydney, and said:

'Have you any room in your stables for four or five horses, Sam?'

'Yes, I have, Mr. Mellish, and I shall be very pleased to get them,' was the reply.

'There is a sale at Fennelly's at the end of the week,' said Mark, 'and I fancy the lots are fairly good. Will you buy five of the best? I want them for a friend of mine, and they can remain in your stables.'

'With pleasure,' said Sam Sandycroft, 'and you may rest assured I will do the best I can.'

'Then that settles it,' replied Mark. 'You can say they are for me, when they are knocked down to you.'

'How about price?'

'I'll leave that to you. I know you will not give more than they are worth.'

The five horses were bought and went into Sam Sandycroft's stable. It was not for some weeks after he made the purchases that the trainer discovered

the horses were the property of Mark Mellish. This set Sam Sandycroft considering, and he came to the conclusion Mark had purchased the horses for the purpose of giving him a lift.

He asked Mark Mellish about it, and the book-maker replied :

‘They are my horses, but as for giving you a lift, that is quite out of the question. I merely bought them and engaged you to train them, because I thought I should make money out of them. I am satisfied ; are you ?’

‘More than satisfied,’ said the trainer, ‘but it is no use beating about the bush ; I know you bought those horses to do me a good turn, and I shall never forget it.’

Mark Mellish laughed as he replied :

‘If that is what you think, one good turn deserves another, and I want you to win a few races for me if you can.’

‘You shall win races, never fear,’ said Sam.

From that day to the present time Sam Sandycroft trained horses for Mark Mellish, and although he received many tempting offers, he always replied :

‘I shall train for Mr. Mellish as long as he wishes me to do so. When he has no further need of my services I shall be at liberty to go elsewhere.’

At the time of Mark Mellish’s visit to Bathurst Sam Sandycroft had a dozen or more horses in training, and some of them were very promising. The

trainer anticipated a real good season, and the horses in his stables justified his confidence.

Herbert Verney came to Sydney soon after Mark Mellish. He was an ardent lover of horses, and had owned one or two fair animals, which he had ridden to victory in amateur riders' races. He had, however, never owned anything really first class, as his purse would not allow him to speculate extensively in horse-flesh.

Mrs. Verney was the widow of John Verney's younger brother, and Herbert was her only child. She was not very strong, and seldom travelled about. On one occasion she went to Bathurst to see John Verney, shortly after her husband's death. She only remained at The Fells two days, and returned to Sydney with anything but a favourable opinion of her late husband's brother. She was not well off, and had gone to Bathurst to persuade her brother-in-law to assist her in educating her son.

'How much do you require?' John Verney had asked bluntly.

'I really do not know,' was her answer.

'Then, madam, I will wait until you have made up your mind,' was the reply.

Mrs. Verney was afraid of him, and thought:

'If I ask too much he will probably refuse to help me at all. I must be careful, for Herbert's sake.'

'Have you made up your mind?' he asked her the next morning.

‘Would two hundred a year be too much?’ she asked timidly.

‘No, madam, it would not be too much. It is not half enough. I will allow you five hundred a year, and you must give the lad a sound education. Don’t over-educate him, mind that. He had better be a little underdone than overdone, he’ll be more likely to make his way in the world. Your son, madam, is my heir, and one day he will be a rich man. But don’t you bring him up with that idea, or I’ll cut him off with a trifle,’ said John Verney.

Mrs. Verney was profuse in her thanks for his generosity, but he cut her short, and said :

‘It is not generosity. I am merely doing my duty. Because your husband, my brother, was a fool, that is no reason his son should suffer for his folly.’

‘I am sure Herbert was no fool,’ said Mrs. Verney, bridling up, and showing she was possessed of spirit ; ‘he was unfortunate, but he was very far from being a fool.

‘I am glad you have that opinion,’ said John Verney. ‘Personally, I hold to the view I have expressed.’

Mrs. Verney left The Fells the next day, and never saw John Verney again. Herbert Verney, however, often visited his uncle, and the old man liked the lad and encouraged his sporting proclivities in every possible way. Young Verney had a good deal of

affection for the eccentric owner of The Fells, and had more influence over his uncle than anyone.

Mrs. Verney was always in a state bordering upon terror whenever she heard her son was going to ride in a race, so she was generally kept in the dark, and heard nothing of it until after the victory or defeat, as the case might be.

She was shocked at the sudden and mysterious death of John Verney, but somewhat consoled by the fact that her son would benefit thereby. She had no thoughts for anyone but her son, and she lavished all her affection upon him. Herbert Verney was very good to his mother. He humoured her in every possible way, and made allowances for her irritability on account of her indifferent health.

On his return from Bathurst he gave his mother a full account of his uncle's death, and expressed the opinion that it was a case of murder, and nothing short of that.

'I shall not rest until I have discovered how my uncle really came by his death,' he said in conclusion.

'The police are the proper persons to find out all about it,' said his mother.

'They can adopt their own plans. I have mine,' replied Herbert, 'and I shall obtain a clue some day, you may rest assured, mother.'

'Your uncle was such an extraordinary man,' said Mrs. Verney, 'that he may have committed suicide.'

'Nonsense!' replied Herbert, in a tone of voice he

seldom used to his mother. 'If you had known him as well as I did, you would never have thought such a thing possible.'

Mrs. Verney thought it wise to drop the subject, but she had very little faith in her son's expressed endeavour to solve the mystery of John Verney's death.

Herbert Verney said nothing about his meeting with Olive Thwaites at Bathurst, but he thought about the girl, and determined it should not be long before he saw her again.

Meanwhile, the change in his fortunes encouraged him to further ventures on the turf, and he knew no man connected with racing who could give him better advice than Mark Mellish. Some men would have doubted advice given by such a prominent member of the Ring as Mark Mellish. But Herbert Verney had a strong and abiding belief in Mark. He had not mixed with racing men for half a dozen years without discovering the estimation in which the 'King of the Ring' was held. There were very few men who had anything but a good word for Mark Mellish. When a man made disparaging remarks about Mellish, Herbert Verney was not long in discerning that the maligner owed the bookmaker money, and was not at all in a hurry to settle.

Mark Mellish was partial to young Verney, and when he saw him enter his shop, a few days after his return from Bathurst, he called Herbert into his

private office. The usual greetings passed between them, and then Herbert Verney said :

‘I want to buy a couple of good horses, Mark. I have owned one or two fair animals, but never a real good one, and now I can afford it, I must try and buy one or two.’

‘Are you going in extensively for racing?’ asked Mark ; ‘because, let me tell you at the outset, it is a serious matter, and may cost you a lot of money.’

‘I don’t see why it should cost such a lot,’ said Herbert, ‘if I have the right sort of horses and the right man to train them.’

‘Both are difficult to find,’ said Mark.

‘You seem to have found them,’ replied Herbert, smiling.

‘I must confess I have been fortunate in that respect,’ said Mark. ‘I have some very good horses now, and Sam Sandycroft is a trainer it would be hard to beat. You have not been to the stables lately. Will you drive over with me and have a look round? Name your own time and day, and I shall be very pleased to go with you.’

An arrangement was made, and after a few moments’ thought Herbert Verney said :

‘I wanted to ask a favour of you, but I hardly know how to put it.’

Most of the favours Mark Mellish was asked to grant were in the shape of loans, but he knew such could not be the case with Herbert Verney.

'Put it in the most favourable light you can,' laughed Mark.

'You will probably think it a piece of cheek on my part,' replied Herbert, 'but I must chance it. I was wondering if you would allow Sam Sandycroft to train three or four horses for me. Of course, if you have any objection I will say no more about it, and we shall be none the less friends on that account.'

Mark Mellish looked serious, and did not immediately reply.

'I see you do not like the idea; we will not discuss it,' said Herbert.

'It is not that,' said Mark, hesitating.

'Then what is it?' asked Herbert.

'I am a bookmaker,' said Mark.

'I am aware of the fact,' laughed Herbert. 'But what has that to do with it?'

'Some people would think it had a good deal to do with it. I am afraid if you had horses in my stable, and they did not always win when you backed them, nasty remarks would be made.'

'I don't grasp the situation,' said Herbert.

'There are people who think we members of the Ring stick at nothing to make money. What I mean is, that it might be said I had allowed a rich young man to have horses in my stable in order the better to fleece him. There are some uncharitable persons who would go as far as that, and I am sorry to say

one or two members of the Club would not be above it,' said Mark.

Herbert Verney was indignant, and said quickly :

'It matters little what jealous outsiders say, Mark. Those who know you as I do would never have the slightest doubt about any of your actions. If that is the only objection you have to my proposal we can pass it at once.'

Still Mark Mellish hesitated. He knew far better than Herbert Verney the bitter animosity existing against a successful member of the Ring, even among men of his own class. He knew if Herbert Verney had horses in his stable exactly what construction would be put upon it by men of less principle than himself. He liked Herbert Verney, and did not wish to run any risk of losing his friendship.

'Think it over,' said Herbert Verney ; 'and bear in mind one thing, Mark : I shall never lose faith in you, whatever happens.'

CHAPTER VII

THE BUYING OF TALISMAN

AFTER a consultation with Sam Sandycroft it was decided that Herbert Verney's horses when purchased should be trained as he desired.

The trainer was instructed to keep his eyes open, and when he saw a chance of purchasing a good horse at a reasonable figure to buy it. It was not long before Sam Sandycroft found what he was on the look-out for.

He had been to Warwick Farm races with a horse of Mark Mellish's, and had expected to win the handicap there. Plutarch, however, ran second to Talisman, and was beaten rather easily at the finish.

Sam Sandycroft knew Plutarch was a very fair horse, and also that he was well, and this convinced him that Talisman must be something out of the common.

Talisman was owned by Leo St. Rollox, an Englishman of good family, who was at one time private secretary to the Governor of Queensland, but for some reason not generally known had resigned his post and come to Sydney. Leo St. Rollox did not bear a good reputation. He was considered fast, and spent money recklessly upon his pleasures, which were many. Still, he was rather a favourite, especially with the ladies, who forgave him much because of his good looks and polite attentions to them. Leo St. Rollox was quite a ladies' man, and it was mainly through their influence he held his position in good society in Sydney. The men disliked him because they distrusted him, and there were many quarrels between brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives, over Leo St. Rollox. Brothers warned their

sisters against him, and were laughed at for their pains. Husbands upbraided their wives for flirting with 'such a fellow' as Leo St. Rollox. The wives replied that he was a harmless creature, and was far more polite to them than their husbands. Leo St. Rollox was aware of these dissensions, and not at all displeased at being the cause.

Mark Mellish had many transactions with St. Rollox, and always found him punctual in his payments, and a shrewd backer of horses. It was seldom St. Rollox made a mistake when he backed a horse, whether he owned it himself or otherwise. If the horse did not win it invariably ran well, and justified his judgment in backing it. Nothing aggravates a man more than backing a horse and not getting a 'good run for his money.' It was seldom St. Rollox did not get a good run.

Sam Sandycroft thought out the matter, and came to the conclusion it would be better to go to St. Rollox and ask him if he would sell Talisman.

Leo St. Rollox lived at Coogee, in a bijou cottage on the road from Randwick, and the Sunday after the Warwick Farm races the trainer walked down to his house. On Sunday morning St. Rollox generally prepared his racing plans for the week. He saw no harm in thus occupying his time when other people were going to church.

Sam Sandycroft walked slowly past the house in the hope that St. Rollox would see him, as he did

not wish him to think he was anxious to have a conversation with him.

Leo St. Rollox was looking over the results of past races, and reckoning up the chances of various horses compared with his own, when he chanced to see the trainer walking past. He had a considerable amount of admiration for Mark Mellish's trainer because he knew him to be a clever man, and he was greatly pleased Talisman had beaten Plutarch the previous day. This was too good an opportunity to be lost of chaffing Sam Sandycroft about the defeat. It was not often he measured swords with the trainer and came off successful.

'Where are you going, Sam?' he called, as he rose from his chair. 'Have you missed your way to church?'

'No,' replied Sam. 'I generally go there when there is an afternoon service; I can sleep better.'

Leo St. Rollox laughed as he said:

'Come inside, and we'll drink Talisman's health then.'

'You beat me there,' said Sam.

'And you didn't expect it,' replied St. Rollox.

'I'm not so sure about that,' answered Sam dubiously, and stroking his chin in a thoughtful manner.

'But Mellish backed his horse for a lot of money. He must have done; it was favourite.'

'He made a book for Plutarch, but he did not back him,' said Sam.

‘Same thing,’ replied St. Rollox. ‘He laid me a good wager about Talisman.’

‘Very kind of him,’ replied Sam; ‘but he’s always doing generous acts.’

Leo St. Rollox laughed as he replied :

‘He was not particularly generous yesterday. He only laid me five to one to a hundred.’

‘Ah!’ said Sam, and there was a lot of meaning in the sound.

‘Surely you do not consider that a good price with a horse like Plutarch only giving him seven pounds?’

‘It was a fair handicap, and under the circumstances Talisman had the best of it,’ said Sam.

‘Under what circumstances?’ asked St. Rollox.

‘Well, you see, Plutarch was not quite himself,’ said the wily Sam.

‘Was he not?’ exclaimed St. Rollox. ‘I saw nothing wrong with him. He looked fit and well, and turned out in your best style.’

‘He looked all right, I’ll grant you that,’ replied Sam; ‘but then, as you are aware, looks are deceiving.’

‘Then you do not think Talisman would have won had your horse been well?’

‘I won’t go as far as that,’ replied Sam, ‘but I think Plutarch is the better of the pair.’

‘Perhaps you are right. Anyway, I am glad I beat you.’

'How many horses have you in training now?' asked Sam.

'Eight, and that's four too many. I can win more races—I mean, have a better average—with four than eight.'

'Are you going to sell any of them?'

Leo St. Rollox looked curiously at Sam as he answered:

'I should not mind selling if I could get a fair price—Talisman, for instance. What's he worth, Sam?'

The trainer shook his head, and the look on his face expressed that he would not have Talisman at a gift.

'Is he worth five hundred pounds?'

Sam sank back in his chair, and, looking hard at Leo St. Rollox, said:

'Five hundred pounds! Why, I could not get that for Plutarch.'

'Sam, you are a humbug!' said St. Rollox, laughing. 'I believe you would buy Talisman if I offered him to you.'

'He'll sell him,' thought Sam, and replied: 'You try me.'

'No, my worthy friend. I know the value of Talisman quite as well as you do, and you have a very fair idea of what he is worth through Plutarch.'

'That's what I am going on,' said Sam.

'What will you give for Talisman?' asked St.

Rollox, who really did not think the horse particularly good, and was inclined to consider his defeat of Plutarch a fluke.

‘What do you want for him?’

‘Five hundred, and a hundred out of the first win.’
Sam shook his head.

‘He’s not worth it,’ he replied.

‘I’m not particularly anxious to sell him,’ said St. Rollox; ‘but I’ll part with him at that price, as I have too many horses in training.’

‘I don’t like contingencies,’ said Sam.

‘Then have him without.’

‘For five hundred?’

‘Yes.’

There was a momentary gleam in the trainer’s eyes, expressive of pleasure, but he merely said sweetly :

‘It’s too much money, it is indeed.’

‘Does Mellish want to buy him?’

‘No,’ said Sam emphatically.

‘Then you want him for yourself?’

‘No.’

‘Who do you want him for?’

‘A new patron,’ said Sam.

‘I never thought Mellish would have any horses in the stables except his own,’ replied St. Rollox.

‘Nor I, but he’s a good sort.’

‘Who is?’

‘The new-comer.’

‘What’s his name? Is it a secret?’

‘No.’

‘You want a lot of cross-questioning,’ laughed St. Rollox. ‘Who is he?’

‘You’ll never guess,’ replied Sam.

‘Do I know him?’

‘Yes, you have ridden against him.’

‘Not Herbert Verney?’ said St. Rollox.

‘You’ve hit it,’ replied Sam.

‘Then you want Talisman for him?’

‘Yes.’

‘What makes you so sweet on Talisman?’ asked St. Rollox.

‘I’m not sweet on him. You said you did not mind selling him. I don’t mind buying him at a price. He’s good enough to start on,’ replied Sam.

‘I should think he was,’ replied St. Rollox, who was rather nettled at the trainer’s tone.

‘Mind you, he’s not too good,’ said Sam, ‘but just good enough.’

‘Well, you can have him for five hundred,’ said St. Rollox.

‘I’ll take him,’ replied the trainer; ‘and if Mr. Verney does not like him, I’ll keep him myself.’

‘You have got a bargain,’ said St. Rollox.

‘Think so? Perhaps he is worth the money,’ said Sam.

‘You know he is, or you would not have been sitting there arguing the point for the last half-hour.’

‘I never waste much time,’ replied Sam.

‘It is my opinion you strolled down here with the intention of ascertaining if I would sell Talisman,’ said St. Rollox.

‘That is not very wide of the mark,’ was Sam’s reply.

Leo St. Rollox laughed heartily as he said :

‘You fancy you are clever, Sam, but I knew what you were after when I saw you walking slowly past.’

‘Did you, though?’ said Sam, with a well-feigned look of surprise. ‘Now I call *that* clever!’

‘I am not considered dull,’ was the reply.

The trainer continued to look at Leo St. Rollox, as though lost in wonder at his astuteness. After a long silence he said :

‘What made you think I was down here after Talisman?’

‘Oh, that was easy enough to see,’ replied St. Rollox. ‘You very seldom come down here on Sunday morning, and still less seldom walk. Then you passed the house as though you felt inclined to call. Also I knew you would think a good deal of Talisman’s defeat of Plutarch. It is all very well for you to try and get the blind side of me, Sam, but it won’t do. I am up to your friendly little games.’

‘Well, it can’t be helped,’ sighed the trainer. ‘Your ideas are quite correct. I came down here to buy Talisman, and I have done so.’

‘And you have got a bargain.’

‘I will not go so far as to say that,’ replied Sam. ‘I must find out what he is worth when I get him home.’

‘You know very well what he is worth, or you would not give five hundred pounds for him.’

It was arranged that Sam Sandycroft should send for Talisman the next morning.

When the trainer was gone Leo St. Rollox thought to himself :

‘That’s not at all a bad deal. I only gave three hundred for him, and he’s a terrible horse to train. He may be sound, but I am doubtful about it.’

‘You are a very clever man, Mr. St. Rollox,’ said the trainer to himself as he walked homewards— ‘very clever indeed, but you were hardly clever enough to know I would have given a good deal more than five hundred pounds for Talisman. Beating Plutarch at seven pounds is quite good enough for me to go upon, and Murchison said he hadn’t a ghost of a show when it came to racing at the finish. I reckon I have made a good deal for Mr. Verney, and I’m sure he’ll be satisfied.’

Sam Sandycroft was in a very amiable frame of mind when he arrived home.

‘Been to church, Sam?’ asked his wife.

‘No. I had a walk down to Coogee, and had a talk with Mr. St. Rollox.’

‘With Mr. St. Rollox?’ said Mrs. Sandycroft.

‘Yes. What about that? You seem surprised.’

Mrs. Sandycroft certainly not only looked surprised, but alarmed.

‘Oh, nothing, Sam,’ she answered somewhat incoherently; ‘but you so seldom go out on Sunday morning, and I did not know you were friendly with Mr. St. Rollox.’

‘Bless the woman!’ exclaimed Sam. ‘How can I help knowing him, when he’s mixed up with racing!’

‘What did you call to see him about?’

Mrs. Sandycroft asked the question timidly, as though dreading the answer. But her husband did not notice her agitation; he was thinking with satisfaction over the bargain he considered he had made.

‘I didn’t call to see him; he called me in,’ said Sam.

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Sandycroft with evident relief.

‘I bought a horse—Talisman.’

‘He beat Plutarch yesterday.’

‘He did; and that’s why I bought him for Mr. Verney,’ said Sam. ‘I got a bargain. Mr. St. Rollox think’s he a clever man, but he’ll have to get up a trifle earlier in the morning to beat me. I’m equal to his sort any day.’

Mrs. Sandycroft was Sam’s second wife, and she had a daughter—Ruth Fitzroy—a good-looking girl, nearly twenty years of age.

Ruth Fitzroy had only a few days ago confided in her mother that Mr. St. Rollox was very attentive to her, and that she was not indifferent to him. Mrs. Sandycroft knew the sort of reputation Mr. St. Rollox

had, and she warned her daughter to be careful in her friendship with him.

Sam Sandycroft was very fond of Ruth, and his wife knew he would not approve of her acquaintance with such a man as Leo St. Rollox.

When she heard her husband say he had been to see Mr. St. Rollox she connected his visit in a way with Ruth, and it was a relief to her mind when she found it had nothing to do with her daughter. Mrs. Sandycroft was ambitious for Ruth to make what she called a 'good match,' and if Mr. St. Rollox had serious intentions in regard to her daughter she saw no reason why obstacles should be placed in their way. Ruth was not a silly girl, whose head would be easily turned by vain compliments, and the fact that she had told her mother of Mr. St. Rollox's attention to her caused Mrs. Sandycroft to have no uneasiness about her. She knew, however, her husband would not view any friendship between Ruth and St. Rollox in the same light as herself.

'Men do not understand such matters,' she said to herself. 'They always look at the worst side first. I'll take good care no harm comes to Ruth.'

CHAPTER VIII

AN INVITATION TO THE FELLOWS

‘BOUGHT Talisman for five hundred pounds!’ said Herbert Verney. ‘Well, I do not call that bad for a start.’

‘It’s an excellent start,’ replied Sam Sandycroft. ‘If I can buy you a couple more as good as Talisman at the same figure, it will be a stroke of luck.’

‘I wonder why St. Rollox sold him,’ said Herbert.

‘I think he thought it a fair price,’ replied the trainer. ‘I fancy he thinks it a slice of luck, beating Plutarch.’

‘Was it?’ asked Herbert Verney.

‘No,’ answered Sam. ‘Plutarch was just about as fit as I could make him, and when he is thoroughly well he is by no means a bad horse.’

‘Then you think I can win a good race with Talisman?’

‘Yes. I should say about a mile will suit him best, or even less. What do you say for the Newmarket Handicap at the Autumn Meeting of the V R. C., at Flemington?’

‘That’s flying at rather high game, is it not?’ asked Herbert.

‘It’s not too high, because Talisman is sure to get a handy weight. His beating Plutarch at Warwick Farm will not count for much in a Newmarket

Handicap. Then there is another reason for going for that particular race.'

'Another reason?' said Herbert inquiringly.

'Mr. Mellish, as you are aware, has a good stayer in Glen Innes; how good he is few people are aware. It would be a splendid double to pull off the Newmarket Handicap, six furlongs, with Talisman, and the Australian Cup, two miles and a quarter, with Glen Innes.'

'By Jove, Sam, that would be a double!' exclaimed Herbert Verney. 'But do you think there is any chance of success?'

'I'm certain of it; and if I can only make sure of winning with your horse, the double is as good as won.'

'Then you think Glen Innes a real good thing for the long race?'

'Yes; I should not like to name one to beat him, even before the entries are out.'

Herbert Verney congratulated himself on having a good horse in Talisman, and he was not ill-pleased at the thought of showing St. Rollox he had made a mistake in selling the horse.

Leo St. Rollox had rather a domineering way with him, and on more than one occasion had looked down upon Herbert Verney as a mere novice in racing matters.

Herbert Verney resented this; for he knew he was a better judge of a horse, and a better rider, although

he might not be so well up in the numerous ins and outs of the turf. There was a certain amount of jealousy, because honours were equally balanced between them as amateur riders.

It was not very long before Herbert Verney found an excuse to go to Bathurst again. He explained to his mother it was necessary he should go and look after affairs at The Fells.

‘I believe you are really going in order to try and find out more about your uncle’s death,’ said Mrs. Verney.

‘That may be the reason, mother,’ he replied, ‘but it is necessary I should look after the estate in my own interests.’

As the train neared Bathurst he wondered if he should see Olive Thwaites again. He knew she was the real attraction drawing him to Bathurst, and not The Fells, or even his uncle’s death.

Mark Mellish, when he heard Herbert Verney was going to Bathurst, asked him to call and see Bob Insch, and inquire if the buggies were built.

‘Hurry him up,’ said Mark. ‘Tell him if he does not send a couple down soon I shall have to countermand the order.’

On his way from the station Herbert Verney thought he might as well call at the carriage-works. He was driving to The Fells, Penistone, the groom, having met him on the arrival of the Sydney train. He pulled up at Insch’s works, and as he drew near to

the office he heard voices inside in angry altercation. He knocked at the door but received no answer.

‘I tell you, Philip Thwaites, you are a scoundrel, and I’m sorry my lass ever married you. If all I hear be true, you are more than a scoundrel. Answer me one question.’

Herbert Verney did not wish to hear more, so he opened the door, and when the two men saw him their angry words ceased.

‘I am afraid I am interrupting you,’ said Herbert.

‘Not at all,’ replied Insch.

Philip Thwaites said ‘Good-afternoon’ in a sheepish tone of voice, and then walked out of the office.

‘He’s a d—— bad lot,’ growled Bob Insch, ‘and he’s my daughter’s husband, worse luck. If she’d had her way, she might have married Mark Mellish, and it was all my fault she did not.’

Herbert Verney had no desire to hear the family history as it would be related by Bob Insch, so he said :

‘Mr. Mellish asked me to call about the buggies he ordered. Have you any of them ready to send to Sydney?’

‘One,’ replied Bob Insch. ‘It is such a hard matter to get good workmen.’

‘You will have to hurry up,’ replied Herbert. ‘Mr. Mellish said he must have two sent down at once or he would countermand the order.’

‘Then he’ll have to get them,’ said Bob. ‘I can’t afford to lose such an order as his.’

‘And I should like you to build me one,’ said Herbert—‘that is, if you can find time.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ replied Bob. ‘I’ll find the time, and the men too, never you fear.’

‘Then you can take the order, and make me one after the same pattern as those you are building for Mr. Mellish.’

‘And I warrant you will neither of you be ashamed of them,’ said Bob.

‘I know my uncle always had a good opinion of your work,’ said Herbert.

‘That he had,’ replied Bob Insch. ‘It was a rare shock to me when I heard he had been murdered.’

‘Then you consider he was murdered?’ said Herbert.

‘Of course I do, and I wish I could lay my hands on the man who did it; he’d have a toughish time of it.’

‘My uncle, I am afraid, was not very popular about here,’ said Herbert.

‘Some people never could get on with him, but in my opinion a better man than John Verney never lived. You could always depend on getting justice when he sat on the Bench. There was no favouritism about him. He was a shrewd man, and could tell the value of evidence as well as any lawyer.’

Herbert Verney was pleased to hear his uncle praised, even by Bob Insch.

‘I’d give a thousand pounds to find out who caused his death,’ said Herbert.

Bob Insch started and looked at him.

‘A thousand pounds,’ he gasped. ‘That’s a heap of money. It’s better than buggy-building.’

Herbert Verney could not help smiling as he replied:

‘You had better turn detective, but before you do so, finish building those buggies.’

‘Will you give me a thousand pounds if I find the man who caused your uncle’s death?’ asked Bob.

‘Certainly I will,’ said Herbert, thinking Bob Insch had very little chance of earning it.

‘Then I’ll have a good look for him,’ said Bob.

‘But do not neglect your business,’ said Herbert. ‘You will find trying your hand at detective work rather different to building buggies.’

‘I’ll combine the two,’ said Bob. ‘I hear a good deal more in this place than you’d think, and I should not be at all surprised if I get a clue before the police.’

‘I should not be surprised at that,’ said Herbert. ‘The law, and the guardians of the law, are not noted for rapidity of movement.’

He left Bob Insch in his office and drove to The Fells.

Whenever Herbert Verney sat in his uncle’s room at The Fells, he could not help thinking over the fate that had overtaken him.

He pictured to himself how it all happened, but could never arrive at any satisfactory conclusion about the cuts on the wrists. He had to confess he did not see how both wrists could have been cut during a struggle. Time after time he examined the desk at which his uncle had sat, in the hope of finding some clue to the mystery, but none was forthcoming.

Where was the ring? He asked himself this question over and over again, and thought :

‘ If the ring is found, it may lead to the discovery of the man who committed the crime.’

The police were not aware that five hundred pounds and a solid gold ring had been stolen from Mr. Verney’s safe.

Old John Verney had shown Herbert the peculiarity of this ring. To all outward appearances it was a plain solid gold ring, which might have been used as a wedding-ring, or otherwise.

Herbert Verney, however, knew how to recognise it. Under the stamped crown on the inside of the ring was a small ‘ v.’ So small was it that it was difficult to see it with the naked eye, but it could be seen by anyone who knew it was there. A mere casual glance at the stamp would not, however, be sufficient to disclose this private mark.

Herbert Verney felt certain the ring would not be thrown away or destroyed, because of the great difficulty there would be in identifying it as the one John

Verney had in his possession. No one knew John Verney had such a ring except his nephew and Mark Mellish, and the bookmaker was unaware of the private mark upon it.

Herbert Verney had a presentiment that this ring would one day solve the mystery surrounding his uncle's death. It was by pure chance he met Olive Thwaites on the Kelso road the day after he arrived at Bathurst. When she saw him, a faint blush was noticeable on her cheeks, but she appeared quite self-possessed. He stopped and spoke to her, and in a very short time put her quite at her ease.

'If it is not an impertinent question, may I ask where you are going?'

'Nowhere in particular,' she replied. 'I was merely taking a walk. I often go along this road.'

'May I walk with you?' he asked deferentially.

She hesitated a moment, and then said:

'If you wish it.'

He turned and went back with her some distance along the road. Their conversation was ordinary, not to say commonplace. There was no attempt at a mild flirtation on his part or on hers. They might have been mere acquaintances, as such they were, only each felt attracted toward the other. Even the most trivial and commonplace conversations, uttered during an everyday walk, assume an importance quite out of keeping with the words spoken on such occasions. When they turned back

and walked towards Bathurst, The Fells was plainly visible on the hillside.

‘Have you ever been to The Fells?’ he asked.

‘No,’ replied Olive.

‘It is an interesting old place,’ said Herbert.
‘Would you care to look over it?’

‘I should like to see your home,’ she said simply.

His home; she would like to see The Fells because it was his home. This was distinctly encouraging, and yet he knew she meant nothing by it.

‘I shall be very pleased to do the honours—bachelor honours—if you will call some day with your mother or your father,’ he said after a slight hesitation.

She thanked him, and said she would mention the matter to her mother. He felt relieved when she did not mention her father.

They walked into Bathurst together, and parted at the corner of the street in which Philip Thwaites resided.

‘And you will write and let me know when you are coming to see The Fells?’ he said, as he shook hands with her.

‘I will write and tell you what my mother has to say about it,’ she replied.

He felt rebuked, but smiled at her as he raised his hat, and they parted.

He had seen her, and that was all. He felt he had not made much progress with her, and her modesty

pleased him, and encouraged him in thinking she was the nicest girl he had ever met.

She was quite at her ease with him. Evidently she had received a good education, and had been well brought up, notwithstanding that she was the daughter of Philip Thwaites.

Herbert Verney had taken a violent dislike to Philip Thwaites. He much preferred Robert Insch of the two, and in this he showed judgment. Robert Insch was intemperate, but he was honest; Philip Thwaites was temperate, but not honest.

When Olive Thwaites arrived home, she found her mother alone, and told her where and with whom she had been. She also spoke of Herbert Verney's invitation to The Fells.

Mrs. Thwaites loved her daughter dearly, and she knew the temptations that beset girls of Olive's age when good-looking young men cast eyes upon them.

Her own experience made her fearful for her daughter. She said she would think the matter of the invitation over, and with this Olive was content, secretly hoping her mother would decide in favour of an acceptance.

Mrs. Thwaites mentioned the matter to her husband.

'Go, by all means,' said Philip Thwaites.

She knew he would counsel her to accept Herbert Verney's invitation, and she also knew his reason. Philip Thwaites was selfish, and his wife knew he saw in this invitation to The Fells signs that Herbert

Verney was attracted by Olive. She felt her husband would sacrifice his daughter's happiness if by so doing he could benefit himself. This she vowed he should not do, under any circumstances. He had killed her happiness ; he should not kill her child's.

After due consideration Mrs. Thwaites saw no reason why she should not accompany her daughter to The Fells, and when she told Olive her decision, the girl was happy.

'Olive,' said her mother, 'what do you think of Mr. Verney?'

'He is a gentleman,' said Olive, 'and I have never met anyone I like better, but I have only met him twice.'

'He is rich,' said Mrs. Thwaites—'in a far different position to ours.'

'I do not think his position influences him one little bit, mother.'

'And you think he really wishes us to call at The Fells?'

'Yes.'

'Then you may write and say we will call on Friday afternoon,' said her mother.

CHAPTER IX

‘WHAT’S UP WITH THE BOSS?’

OLIVE THWAITES looked forward to her visit to The Fells as anxiously as her mother. She had a presentiment that it would be of importance, and might have an influence upon her future life. She had no cause to think Herbert Verney regarded her with more than ordinary interest, and yet something told her such was the case. They had only met twice, and everything that passed between them was commonplace. She had heard much about The Fells when John Verney occupied it, and her father was a frequent visitor there on business connected with the negotiating of loans. From him she had gathered that the late owner of The Fells was a hard man. ‘Nothing more nor less than a money-lender’ was Philip Thwaites’ definition of him.

It was one of John Verney’s many eccentricities that he declined to receive such visitors as Philip Thwaites until after eight o’clock at night. Why, no one had ever been able to understand, and very few people took the trouble to inquire. When John Verney said ‘after eight,’ men who wished to obtain assistance from him knew that he meant it, and that it would be fatal to the object of their visit if they arrived before that hour.

Herbert Verney received Olive’s note, and as he

handled it felt a peculiar sensation of pleasure. He knew it must be from Olive, and he saw she wrote a good hand, not cramped and stiff, but easy and flowing, indicating that her thoughts came freely. He was anxious to see her at The Fells, as a kind of experiment, to note how the surroundings suited her, and how she harmonized with the surroundings. He was not at present desperately in love, so he viewed Olive from an ordinary standpoint, and did not elevate her upon a pedestal—a pedestal love sometimes raises so high that the fall is severe, and shatters the object placed on the top.

Mrs. Thwaites and Olive walked to The Fells, and arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon. Herbert Verney welcomed them heartily, and quickly showed them how pleased he was that they had accepted his invitation. He did the honours of the house, which contained many quaint and curious things John Verney had collected together.

Mrs. Thwaites was woman enough of the small world in which she lived to see that, whatever else John Verney might have been, he was a man of taste, and had possessed wealth to gratify his desires. There was, however, very little about the house that appealed to a woman. Everything showed that John Verney was a confirmed bachelor, and regarded his own comfort as paramount.

Olive was delighted. She had never seen so many beautiful objects of art, and her almost childish eager-

ness to examine and know the use of things amused, and at the same time gratified, Herbert Verney. Had Olive been bent upon attracting him, she could have found no more effective way of doing so.

‘It must have taken your uncle many years to accumulate such a mass of beautiful things,’ said Olive, as she picked up a curious old knife with a very sharp keen blade.

‘That belonged to an old Indian servant of my uncle’s,’ said Herbert. ‘Perhaps you were not aware, Mrs. Thwaites, that my uncle spent several years in India as an indigo-planter?’

‘No, I was not aware of it,’ said Mrs. Thwaites.

‘Very few people know such was the case. That was how he laid the foundation of his fortune.’

‘What an interesting country India must be!’ said Olive. ‘I suppose many of these beautiful things came from India?’

‘The bulk of them,’ said Herbert. ‘My uncle often amused me with stories about India when I was a lad. His tiger stories were simply wonderful, so extraordinary that had any other man told me them, I should have refused to believe him.’

‘Then you believed all your uncle’s tiger stories?’ said Olive, smiling, and Herbert thought: ‘How pretty she is when she smiles!’

‘Yes, I believed them,’ he said. ‘For one reason, my uncle was fond of fishing, and I never knew him to tell me any “fish lies,” if I may put it in that way.

Tiger stories and fish stories are, I believe, generally supposed to have originated with Ananias.'

Olive laughed merrily, and Mrs. Thwaites joined her.

'My uncle's fondness for fishing began in India. They have an ideal way of fishing, these indigo-planters, far more comfortable than the modern way of angling at The Ford.'

'I have seen some good sport at The Ford,' said Olive.

'In India my uncle told off the coolie boys to carry his chair, fishing tackle, and bait down to the stream. These were followed by a punkah, lots of iced drinks, cigars, and sundries. Ensconced in his chair, with his cigar alight, and the punkah gently being used by one of the coolie boys to fan him, my uncle threw in his line—that was about as far as he went in the way of exertion—and placidly awaited the result. The fish were small, but numerous, and as fast as he pulled them out a coolie boy took them off the hook, baited it afresh, and then threw the line in again. "That is what I call the fine art of fishing," my uncle used to say,' said Herbert Verney, laughing.

Olive had the knife in her hand while he was speaking, and as she put it down on the table it rolled and actually stood with the edge uppermost.

'That is curious,' said Herbert, as he noticed it.

He picked up the knife, and placed it on the table

again, and, strange to relate, it rolled over into a similar position.

‘I have not noticed that before,’ said Herbert. ‘It must be weighted at the back.’

He examined it carefully, but found nothing peculiar about it. A thought, however, occurred to him, and he took the knife downstairs with him, and placed it in the sheath on his uncle’s desk.

Mrs. Thwaites noticed this, and thought she knew why he had done so.

The time passed quickly, and after tea Herbert Verney said he would drive them back to Bathurst.

‘Oh, please do not trouble,’ said Mrs. Thwaites ; ‘we shall enjoy the walk.’

‘But it will be dark before you arrive home,’ he replied, ‘and I have to go into Bathurst either to-night or early in the morning.’

Mrs. Thwaites raised no further objection, and Olive was glad she did not.

‘It is not quite dark,’ said Herbert ; ‘we have a quarter of an hour or so before the light vanishes. Would you care to see the stables ?’

Olive was very fond of horses, and was an excellent rider ; so Mrs. Thwaites said :

‘Olive would like to see the horses. She rides very well, Mr. Verney. She took the prize in the leaping competition at the last show.’

‘By Jove ! so you did,’ said Herbert, ‘now I come

to think of it ; and I remember my uncle telling me how well you rode.'

The actual words John Verney had used were : 'That girl of Thwaites's rides uncommon well. Pity she's got such a scamp of a father.'

Herbert Verney, exercising his discretion, modified this eulogium.

Olive blushed with pleasure and said :

'I had a particularly clever horse to ride, and I think any good rider could have won on him.'

'Olive, that is not fair to yourself,' said her mother smilingly. 'He was a very difficult horse to ride, Mr. Verney. I dare say you have seen him. Mr. Raoul owns him—a big bay horse, and a terrible hard puller.'

'You rode that brute over hurdles and won on him!' said Herbert in surprise ; for Olive did not look strong enough to ride a hard-mouthed horse nearly seventeen hands high.

'Yes, I rode him ; but he is not half such a *brute*'—she emphasised the word—'as many people think. He wants careful handling. He went all right with me.'

'Then you must have wonderful hands and an admirable temper,' said Herbert.

'She has both,' answered Mrs. Thwaites quietly, 'and yet she is very determined.'

'Mother, I did not visit The Fells to have my character analyzed,' said Olive, laughing.

‘Quite right,’ said Herbert, ‘and it is not fair; but, all the same, I am glad to hear you handled Mr. Raoul’s horse so well. I am awfully fond of horses—in fact, I have ridden a good many races, and own several racers. Up to now they have not been much good, but Sam Sandycroft bought Talisman for me the other day, and he is something out of the common, I think. Sandycroft trains for Mark Mellish.’

Olive looked quickly at her mother, but Mrs. Thwaites merely said :

‘You are in a good stable, then.’

‘I am glad you think so,’ said Herbert. ‘Mark is a real good fellow, and Sam Sandycroft a splendid trainer. I ought to win a few races.’

‘I hope you will,’ said Olive.

‘Perhaps you will be there to see Talisman win,’ he answered.

‘I am afraid that is hardly likely,’ she replied. ‘I very seldom leave Bathurst.’

‘We will proceed to the stables,’ said Herbert. ‘I dare say we shall be able to see. I have only four horses here now. I wish poor old Hereward had escaped such a sad end. It was strange that both my uncle and his horse should be killed the same night.’

‘We were all very much shocked at it,’ said Mrs. Thwaites.

Herbert conducted them to the stables, and Olive

saw he was a good judge when she looked at the horses.

‘That’s a perfect jumper, and if you will promise to ride him I will have him trained for the next show,’ he said to Olive.

‘That is very kind of you,’ she replied. ‘I will ride him with pleasure.’

‘The kindness is on your side,’ he answered, ‘for it will win me the prize.’

‘I think I shall beat Mr. Raoul,’ she replied, smiling.

‘Then you like The Gem?’ said Herbert.

‘Very much indeed. What a pretty name for him!’ said Olive.

‘I must not take credit for naming him; he was The Gem when I bought him,’ said Herbert.

Fred Penistone brought a light into the stable, as it was now dark, and, holding it up, Olive saw the horse more to advantage.

‘He looks like a jumper,’ she said, as she went up to him.

The Gem turned his head and looked at her inquiringly. He was evidently satisfied he would be properly inspected, and quietly resumed his evening meal.

‘Go on with your supper, old boy,’ said Olive, as she patted him; ‘don’t mind me. I shall not interfere with your appetite, which from all appearances is a good one.’

‘You’re right there, Miss Thwaites,’ said Penistone ;
‘he is a regular good doer.’

‘Miss Thwaites will ride him at the next show,’
said Herbert, ‘and mind you have him in good trim.’

Fred Penistone smiled as he replied :

‘It won’t be for want of good riding, then, if he
loses. I’ll do my best with him.’

‘Corroborative evidence,’ laughed Herbert. ‘You
see you are generally acknowledged to be a clever
rider.’

‘There’s not many men could have ridden Shooter
like Miss Thwaites did,’ said Penistone, looking at
Olive admiringly.

‘I am sure you could have done so,’ she replied.

Fred Penistone smiled. A word of praise from
Olive Thwaites carried weight.

‘I won’t go so far as to say I couldn’t have won
on him,’ said Fred ; ‘but you handled Shooter as
no man could have done, and that’ll be proved at the
next show.’

‘We shall see,’ replied Olive. ‘If Mr. Raoul rides,
he may beat The Gem.’

‘Never !’ said Fred confidently.

‘I think we had better leave now,’ said Mrs.
Thwaites. ‘We have to thank you for a very
pleasant afternoon.’

‘Which I hope will not be the last pleasant after-
noon you will spend here,’ replied Herbert. ‘Now
Miss Thwaites has been so good as to say she will

ride The Gem, she must come and give him a few trials here.'

'Yes, mother, I must make the acquaintance of The Gem in a practical manner,' said Olive.

'We shall see,' replied her mother. 'Perhaps it will be safer for you to do so.'

'Of course it will,' replied Herbert quickly. 'I should not like Miss Thwaites to ride any horse of mine she had not confidence in.'

Herbert Verney drove Mrs. Thwaites and her daughter home and bade them good-night.

As he shook hands with Olive she felt the pressure of his grasp, and allowed her hand to remain in his rather longer than is usual when mere acquaintances part.

'And you will be sure and persuade your mother to come over with you before I leave for Sydney?' he said.

'Yes, I think she will come,' said Olive, 'and I do want to have a ride on The Gem. Good-night.'

As Herbert Verney drove home he forgot all about the call he had to make in Bathurst; events of more importance had crowded it out of his mind; he still felt the pressure of Olive's warm, firm hand in his own. It was a small hand, but he knew if she could hold Shooter in check it was also strong.

'I like her better every time I see her,' he thought; 'and I think she is not indifferent to me. Curious thing about that knife. Strange she should pick it

up like that. I wonder if it had anything to do with those cuts on the wrists. Impossible! It was not in the room, not on the desk. Olive. Yes, it’s a nice name. I like Olive immensely. I’m glad she’s so fond of horses. We shall get on; I’m sure we shall.’

When he arrived at The Fells he drove into the stable-yard. Fred Penistone was waiting for him.

‘You must do your best with The Gem,’ said Herbert. ‘I want Miss Thwaites to ride the winner.’

‘She’d win on a worse horse than The Gem,’ replied Fred.

‘Then you really think her a good horsewoman?’

‘There’s none about here can touch her,’ said Fred.

Then he added, in a quiet, confidential tone, as though it was of the utmost importance his master should know what he was about to say:

‘She’s such a stunner, sir, all the boys around here call her “Tommy Corrigan.”’

‘Then it’s a d——d piece of impertinence on their part,’ said Herbert angrily. ‘Mind you never let me hear it, or out you go, every man-Jack of you,’ and he walked away, kicking the loose stones viciously.

‘Well, I’m blest!’ said Fred. ‘I thought he’d be pleased. “Tommy Corrigan!” Why, she couldn’t have a better compliment paid her. Wasn’t Tommy the best rider over sticks we ever had in Australia? “Tommy Corrigan!” If I’d a sister as could ride

well enough to be called "Tommy Corrigan," I'd be mighty proud of it. What's up with the boss? I wonder. Something must have riled him. Perhaps he's—— That's it! Yes, that's it,' and Fred Penistone screwed up his mouth and gave forth a long whistle, whose sound was a blend of surprise, satisfaction at his own cleverness in making a discovery, and at solving the question he had propounded, 'What's up with the boss? I wonder.'

CHAPTER X

A DARING LEAP

OLIVE THWAITES had no difficulty in persuading her mother to allow her to ride over to The Fells to try The Gem.

In the country districts of Australia there is a freedom from restraint, and ordinary conventional rules, which must render the lives of such girls as Olive Thwaites far more pleasant than under more stringent conditions.

Olive rode over to The Fells unattended. This was very wrong, of course, and ought not to have been allowed, but being a fact, it is placed on record, and it may as well be stated at the outset that no harm came of it.

She enjoyed her ride, as she always did, and although her horse was not of any considerable

value, he was better than no horse at all, and Olive was a girl who was thankful for small mercies, and joyfully accepted whatever it pleased Providence to send her. How much happier the general run of people would be if they would only take things as they come, and not persist in 'crying for the moon'!

Olive, on her ordinary nag, cantered leisurely along the Kelso Road, and Herbert Verney, standing at the front door of The Fells, saw her in the distance and recognised her. Love is a splendid race-glass. Olive did not see him, for she was occupied in looking at the country around her. She had seen the same landscape hundreds of times, but it never palled upon her. She loved the country, and well she might, for it gave her health and strength and the bloom on her cheeks, and the freshness of body and soul which rendered her far more attractive than any artificial restorative. There was nothing artificial about Olive Thwaites. She was genuine, sound in body and mind, and would probably have had the bad taste to be disgusted at a problem play; happily for her such false representations of society had never been placed in her way. She cantered her horse on the grass, while the fresh air blew around her, and she gloried in the joy of living. As she neared The Fells she saw Herbert Verney coming down the drive to meet her. She was pleased to think he had been on the lookout for her, and, being a genuine girl, showed it in her manner of greeting him.

'Here I am,' she said, 'ready to tackle The Gem.'

'Tackle The Gem.' No occasion to be shocked at the expression. It is far better than the lipped indecencies of some half-dressed woman who knows better but has been trained in a fast school.

'He's not a particularly hard horse to tackle,' said Herbert, laughing, 'although he plays tricks sometimes. I can assure you I would not let you mount him if I thought there was the slightest danger.'

She was glad he was solicitous for her, and replied:

'I think The Gem will not prove quite so troublesome as Shooter.'

'I am sure he will not,' said Herbert. 'Mr. Raoul ought not to have allowed you to ride such a horse.'

'But I insisted upon riding him,' said Olive; 'it was entirely my own fault, and no harm came of it.'

'I should not let you ride such an animal as Shooter, however much you insisted,' he replied.

'Did not my mother tell you I was very determined?' asked Olive, smiling.

'I believe she did,' he replied.

'Then beware!' said Olive.

'Of what?'

'How you thwart me, or I may decline to ride The Gem.'

'You will not do that,' he said quietly.

'Why?'

‘Because you have given your word to ride him,’ he answered.

‘And you think I keep my word?’

‘I am sure of it,’ he replied confidently.

Olive rode her horse round to the stables, and as Fred Penistone led him into a loose-box he muttered :

‘It’s a pity old Thwaites cannot give her a better mount than this. Come up, old bag o’ bones! You look as if a good feed of oats would not come amiss; and by Gad you shall have one!’

After attending to Olive’s horse, Fred Penistone saddled The Gem and led him to the jumping-ground.

Olive, assisted by Herbert Verney, sprang lightly on to the saddle and cantered The Gem gently round.

Herbert saw she was an accomplished rider by the way she sat the horse, and he felt there was no danger to be apprehended.

After two or three canters round, to warm him to his work, Olive put The Gem at a set of hurdles, and the horse went over them in taking style. She was pleased with her mount, and looked round for a stiffer jump. At the far side of the field was a log fence—three huge logs placed one above the other—and a horse had either to clear the jump or come to grief. There was no knocking such a fence down.

Herbert Verney, seeing her intention, called to her to come back, but Olive merely waved her hand and went on.

‘She’ll clear it right enough,’ said Fred Penistone.

‘Can The Gem get over it?’ asked Herbert.

‘He’d clear anything with Miss Thwaites on his back, and be proud to do it,’ replied Fred.

Herbert Verney knew The Gem could jump well, but he would much have preferred Olive not trying such a stiff fence the first time she had ridden him. There was, however, no help for it now, and he must hope for the best.

Olive turned The Gem round, and when the horse faced the fence and saw the serious obstacle in front of him, he pricked his ears, snorted, and then set off at top speed. There was no hesitation about The Gem. Olive felt that immediately, and she knew the horse was daring to rashness. She took firm hold of the reins, and held him well in hand. If The Gem had plenty of pluck, so had his rider, and the intention of each was evidently the same, namely, to land safe and sound on the other side.

Herbert Verney almost held his breath as The Gem neared the jump. He wished it was over, and vowed Olive should never attempt it again.

Fred Penistone looked on admiringly. Here was something he understood thoroughly, and relished it the more because there was a spice of danger in it.

As The Gem neared the logs Olive steadied him for the jump. In a moment horse and rider were in the air, and The Gem flew the big fence, with a lot to spare, and landed safely on the other side.

‘Bravo!’ shouted Herbert. ‘That was splendid. Good heavens, Fred! What’s she up to?’ he exclaimed as he saw Olive wheel The Gem round.

‘I should say she’s going to take him back the way he came,’ chuckled Fred.

‘What are you grinning in that infernal manner for?’ said Herbert angrily.

‘He’ll jump it all right,’ said Fred.

‘But it’s far harder this way,’ said Herbert excitedly. ‘It’s up-hill.’

There was no time to interfere, had interference been of any use, for Olive, without giving The Gem much time for a breather, put him at the log fence again.

There was a slight rise in the ground, and Olive knew it was a difficult jump, but she was aware how easily The Gem had gone over at the first attempt.

Her confidence was not misplaced. The Gem knew what was before him, and went at the logs in a ‘conquer or die’ frame of mind, meaning to conquer if it was in his power.

How splendidly he went at the fence! and how Olive admired him for his pluck!

She let him have his head up the hill and gave him plenty of freedom as he rose to the jump. Over went The Gem and landed splendidly on the far side.

‘That will do, old boy,’ said Olive, patting his neck. ‘You are a splendid fellow. There’ll be

nothing to touch us at the show. Shooter won't be in it. Shooter indeed! Why, he hasn't half the pluck you have; he would have come an awful cropper over those logs. Shooter is all rush and tearaway, but you take things much cooler. There's no comparison between you; you are a gem indeed.'

The horse appeared to appreciate these remarks, for he walked proudly to where Herbert Verney stood.

'You ought not to have attempted that jump,' said Herbert. 'It was too risky. Only think how I should have felt if anything had happened to you.'

'And pray, how do you think I should have felt,' asked Olive, 'had we come to grief?'

'I am afraid you would not have had much chance of feeling had you fallen over such a jump,' he replied seriously.

'There was really no danger,' said Olive. 'The Gem is such a splendid fencer. I think you can depend upon winning the first prize at the show.'

'And if I do win it,' he said, 'you must accept a gift from me for winning the prize.'

'A gift?' said Olive. 'I could not think of it, Mr. Verney. I never accept anything for riding.'

'But you must make an exception in my case,' he said.

'Why in your case?' she asked.

The question was difficult to answer, so he replied:

'I really do not know what reason to advance why

you should make an exception in my case ; perhaps, however, when you know the nature of the gift, you will accept it. May I tell you what I propose to offer you ?

‘ If you wish,’ she replied, looking down at him from her seat on The Gem’s back.

‘ Will you accept The Gem if you win on him ?’ asked Herbert.

‘ Oh, Mr. Verney !’ gasped Olive, and he saw how her face flushed with pleasure at the prospect of owning such a horse.

‘ Then you like the idea ?’ he said.

‘ But I could not possibly accept such a gift from you. The Gem—he is worth such a lot of money. It would not be right for me to accept him,’ she said, with a wistful little sigh of regret.

‘ Of course it would be right,’ he replied eagerly. ‘ Please accept my offer.’

He assisted her to dismount, and as she stood looking at The Gem the horse poked his soft, velvety nose against her shoulder.

‘ You see The Gem is begging you to accept my offer,’ said Herbert.

‘ I should love to own a horse like that,’ said Olive.

‘ And you will own him if you accept my offer,’ said Herbert.

It did not take much eloquence on his part to persuade her to accept. The temptation was too great to be resisted. Olive felt certain she could

win the prize on The Gem, and to own such a horse would make her the proudest girl in the western district.

As she rode her own poor steed homewards she wondered if she had after all done right in saying she would accept The Gem if he won the prize.

She did not know how to broach the subject to her mother, but she determined to tell her what she had done.

Philip Thwaites was in the room when she entered, and he said :

‘ I hear you have been to The Fells. How did you get on with young Verney ?’

She replied that she had enjoyed her ride very much, and that The Gem was a splendid jumper.

‘ You are going to ride him at the show, I hear.’

‘ Mr. Verney asked me to do so,’ said Olive.

‘ I wish I could buy you a horse like The Gem,’ he said ; ‘ but times are too bad. Do you know, Olive, I have serious thoughts of going to Sydney, just to try my luck in the Ring.’

‘ Have you ?’ she answered without much show of interest.

Her father was always discovering ways and means of making money, but they seldom came to anything.

‘ Yes, I have,’ he snapped. ‘ Don’t you like the idea ?’

‘ You know what is best,’ she said, ‘ but you have

made so many suggestions that have come to nothing, I thought it was only another to be added to the list.'

'I mean it this time, honour bright,' he said. 'I know your mother will object, and you must help to talk her over. There's a heap of money to be made in the Ring. Look at Mark Mellish, what a pile he has made, and if Mark can make money, surely I can.'

Mrs. Thwaites entered the room while the conversation between father and daughter was going on and Philip Thwaites said :

'I have been telling Olive there is money to be made in the Ring, and I am thinking of going to Sydney.'

'Are you?' said his wife quietly.

She had no more faith in his schemes than Olive; he had tried so many which had proved abortive.

'Of course I am. What a stupid question to ask! Olive tells me she is going to ride The Gem at the show for Mr. Verney.'

'I think I told you when we returned from The Fells,' said Mrs. Thwaites.

'Did you?' he growled. 'Then I must have forgotten all about it.'

'Mr. Verney has promised me a gift if I win,' said Olive, looking at her mother.

'Eh?' said Philip Thwaites.

Olive repeated what she had said.

‘And what does he propose to give you?’ said Philip Thwaites—‘the prize?’

‘You know very well I should not accept money,’ said Olive.

‘Money comes in very handy,’ said her father, ‘so you need not be so mighty independent about it.’

‘She would not have much independence if she accepted it,’ said Mrs. Thwaites; ‘and I am surprised at Mr. Verney making you such an offer, Olive.’

‘What’s there to be surprised at?’ grumbled Philip Thwaites. ‘If Olive rides the winner for him, she deserves a very handsome present. What did he say he would give you?’

‘He said he would give me The Gem if I won on him,’ said Olive.

‘Now I call that handsome,’ said her father. ‘I should not have expected that of a Verney.’

‘You declined his offer, of course?’ said her mother.

‘I should think she did nothing so foolish,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘I declined to accept any gift——’ commenced Olive.

‘Then you are a bigger fool than I thought you,’ growled her father.

‘I declined at first,’ went on Olive, ‘but Mr. Verney persuaded me to accept his offer. And oh, mother, The Gem is such a beautiful horse, I really could not refuse to try and win him.’

Mrs. Thwaites saw it was the horse Olive thought

more of than the gift, and this somewhat modified her feelings on the matter. She would, however, have preferred that Olive should have declined Herbert Verney’s offer. She knew people would make uncharitable remarks about such a gift, and that Olive might be hurt when she heard how it was regarded.

When Olive left the room Philip Thwaites said to his wife :

‘Young Verney’s smitten ; there’s no doubt about that. It would be a jolly good thing for all of us if he would take up with Olive.’

CHAPTER XI

‘A FOLLOWER OF THE GAME’

MARK MELLISH amidst ‘the roar of the ring’ was as much at home as a sailor on the deck of a ship battling with the howling winds and waves. He was accustomed to the Babel of sounds heard in the Ring, and it made his pulses beat quick, and his brain became alert and active. He loved a stiff battle with the odds, and never failed to accommodate a customer, however great his demands might be.

He was in his favourite spot now in the Ring at Randwick, standing under a huge tree whose leaves shaded him from the sun. He had two clerks at his side, for he always had a good check kept on his book,

The first race over Mark glanced down the list his clerk was busily balancing, and saw there a substantial balance in his favour.

It was not one of the most important of the meetings held at Randwick during the year, but an 'off day' of the Australian Jockey Club. Still there was a good deal of curiosity evinced over the Randwick Handicap, for it was a six-furlong race, and there were several horses in it with chances of winning the Newmarket Handicap at Flemington later on. The race was regarded somewhat in the light of a trial of the local horses for the big Melbourne Sprint. At least a dozen of the twenty-four runners were fancied, and the speculation on the event was far in advance of most ordinary races.

Mark Mellish was in his element when such races as the Randwick Handicap were run, and he fielded with a boldness that astonished many of the older members of the Ring.

Quite a crowd collected round Mark some three-quarters of an hour before the race, and he was kept busy all the time. There was, however, one horse he declined to lay, and that was Talisman; and the reason he gave was:

'You know I never bet against my own horses.'

'But this is not your horse, Mark,' complained an anxious backer.

'No, but he is in my stable, and it amounts to the same thing as regards my book.'

The fact that Mark Mellish would not lay Talisman had not much effect upon the status of the horse in the market, for the majority of racing men knew what an objection the bookmaker had to lay against his own stable.

Leo St. Rollox had a horse in the race, called Tearaway, which he thought the superior of Talisman. Tearaway was favourite, but as speculation was brisk, the liberal odds of seven to one were offered on the field. Tearaway had beaten Talisman in a trial before the latter's defeat of Plutarch at Warwick Farm, and so St. Rollox had every justification for his confidence.

Sam Sandycroft was not particularly sweet on the chance of Talisman, for he knew the horse was not thoroughly wound up; still he fancied he would run well, and advised Herbert Verney to have a moderate amount on him.

‘He'll be much better by Newmarket Handicap time,’ said Sam, ‘but it will do him no harm to run here. We shall get a good line to go upon, and he may win, but I doubt that.’

‘Then I shall only have fifty on him,’ said Herbert.

‘That is quite sufficient,’ was the trainer's reply.

Horses much fancied for the race were Monteagle, Burwah and Omrah, and the first-named was perhaps as well backed as anything in the race.

When Leo St. Rollox fancied a horse, he

backed it heavily, and as the price was tempting against Tearaway, he determined to win a good stake.

Mark Mellish accommodated him with seven 'monkeys,' and in all he had about a thousand pounds on his horse.

His lead was followed by others, and eventually Tearaway became a firm first favourite.

As he walked across the paddock, St. Rollox met Herbert Verney, and said to him :

'If you want a win, Verney, have a trifle on Tearaway.'

'I have backed my own horse,' he replied.

St. Rollox smiled, and answered :

'It will not do any harm now to tell you that Talisman was beaten by Tearaway before he won at Warwick Farm.'

Herbert Verney looked surprised. If such were the case, Tearaway must stand a splendid chance. He hardly believed it, however, and knew St. Rollox was somewhat given to 'blowing' about his horses and their chances.

St. Rollox saw the look of doubt on Herbert Verney's face, and said :

'If you don't believe me, I'll bet you five hundred to half that amount Tearaway beats Talisman. Will that convince you?'

'I do not doubt what you say,' replied Herbert. 'I have fifty on Talisman, and I'll bet you a level

fifty he beats Tearaway. That is quite sufficient for a friendly wager, and I do not require odds.’

‘As you please,’ replied St. Rollox. ‘I will accept your offer.’

Talisman was saddled opposite the jockeys’ room, and as Herbert went across the Ring, he put a ten-pound note on St. Rollox’s horse to cover his wager if Tearaway won.

Talisman looked well, and yet, to the practised eyes of men accustomed to seeing racehorses, he would not have been pronounced fit. The horse looked too well, as Joe Shap, who was present, having come from Bathurst for the races, thought.

Joe Shap was not a bad judge of a horse; moreover, he was a man who kept a sharp look-out when in the Ring. He had seen St. Rollox and Herbert Verney talking together, and when they separated he followed Herbert and heard him take seventy to ten Tearaway.

‘Don’t fancy his own chance much,’ thought Joe Shap, and then went in search of Talisman.

Having pronounced, according to his judgment, that Talisman was not thoroughly wound up, and having already seen Tearaway, he came to the conclusion he would have his modest fiver on St. Rollox’s horse. This he did, putting the money on with Mark Mellish, who, recognising him in the bustle going on around him, found time to say:

‘I think you are on the right one, Joe. Put

this on for me,' and he slipped a note into his hand.

Bookmakers when they fancy a horse, or gather from their book what is fancied, often back the animal they have laid heavily against with some other member of the Ring. Mark Mellish did this seldom, but he knew when Leo St. Rollox put five hundred on a horse, in one lump, he must have a very strong fancy for it.

When Joe Shap came up to him it suddenly occurred to Mark that he might as well have a hundred on Tearaway, as in case that horse won it would save his book a trifle.

Joe Shap looked at the note and saw it was for a hundred. It was seldom Joe had the pleasure of handling a hundred-pound note, and he hardly knew what to do with it.

It was not every bookmaker who would care to lay the odds to that amount, and many members of the Ring, Joe Shap was aware, would not care to give change for a hundred-pound note to a man they knew very little about.

Joe tried one or two men, handing them the note and asking for change.

'Can't manage it,' was the reply. 'Hundred-pound notes ought not to be handed in for twenty-pound wagers.'

'Then why not lay me the odds to the amount?' asked Joe.

‘Haven’t got a big enough book.’

‘Thought you were a little man,’ replied Joe as he beat a retreat.

At last he found a bookmaker who knew him, and who laid him the odds to fifty pounds and gave him the change.

‘Who is it for?’ he asked.

‘A good man,’ said Joe. ‘Have a bit on yourself.’

‘I will,’ replied the bookmaker.

Joe Shap managed to get the money on at seven to one, and went back and told Mark Mellish what he had done.

A man in Mark Mellish’s position must make some enemies, through jealousy of his good fortune, if nothing else.

Charles Devereux was a man well known in Sydney, and was one of those mysterious individuals who make money by backing horses, or as it is generally called ‘following the game.’ He was not at all particular as to how he carried on the game provided he made it pay. He had an unlimited amount of cheek, and an untiring energy for ferreting out information, which he might have applied to a better and more legitimate occupation with success. He was a stamp of man often to be found amidst ‘the roar of the Ring’ all over the world. The Charles Devereux frequenters of the racecourse seem to be of one family. They have the same harsh cast of features, shifty eyes, moving restlessly all over the

Ring, sharp noses, possessed of a keen scent, which they follow like fox-hounds, darting about the Ring and dodging round the bookmakers with remarkable rapidity and skill in navigation. These men hustle and bustle and jostle respectable lovers of racing, but are quickly too far distant from the objects of their impolite attentions to hear the anathemas hurled after them.

Charles Devereux had a grievance against Mark Mellish. On one occasion the 'follower of the game' had tried to get the better of Mark and failed ignominiously. It was over some trifling wager which Devereux tried to convince a small knot of people round the bookmaker he had won.

Mark Mellish allowed him to harangue the crowd for some time, and then said quietly :

'I never made a wager with you in my life. I do not want such men to bet with me. I think my friends will believe me when I say the ticket you handed in to me has been paid over, and to the proper person. You must have picked it up off the ground, where I carelessly threw it without tearing it. There is a name in pencil on the back of it, with the amount of the wager, which you have evidently not seen. Is Mr. Jameson here?' shouted Mark.

A man pushed his way through the crowd.

'I am Jack Jameson,' he said.

Mark Mellish handed him the ticket and asked :

'Is that your ticket?'

‘Yes, and you paid me,’ was the prompt reply.

When the people looked round for Charles Devereux he was missing, and Mark smiled as he said :

‘It was getting rather too warm for him. You ought to fight shy of such men.’

Charles Devereux had made several lucky ‘rises’ since that time, but he had not forgiven or forgotten Mark Mellish’s exposure of his dirty trick. The more money Devereux managed to scoop together, by fair means or foul, the more he hated Mark Mellish.

He had had the audacity, some twelve months before this particular day, to ask Mark to help him to obtain a bookmaker’s license.

‘Let that little affair between us rest,’ said Devereux ; ‘it did you no harm, and I was hard up.’

‘If you attempt to lay the odds in any Ring,’ said Mark, ‘I will do all in my power to stop you.’

Charles Devereux went away in a rage, vowing vengeance against Mark.

Before the race for the Randwick Handicap Devereux had been darting about the Ring in search of information. He had seen Joe Shap follow Herbert Verney, and then proceeded to watch Joe.

Such men as Devereux seem to divine instinctively where information can be obtained.

Many men would not have thought it worth while

to follow Joe Shap about ; would, in fact, have considered it a waste of time. Devereux, however, had often proved by experience that valuable information is obtained from most unlikely quarters.

Joe Shap's movements appeared to him to denote that he 'knew something,' and accordingly Devereux dodged about after him. Joe Shap had no idea he was being shadowed ; he did not consider himself of sufficient importance to have so much attention paid him. When Joe went to Mark Mellish, Charles Devereux was close behind him. He watched Joe Shap keenly with his ferret-like eyes and saw something pass from Mark Mellish to him. It did not take Devereux long to discover the bookmaker had given Joe Shap money to back something, and he made it his business to find out what that something was.

When he learned Joe Shap had backed Tearaway, he knew it must be for Mellish. At this time Devereux had backed Talisman, and he at once thought :

'This is a nice game they are playing. Talisman is not in it, and they are going for Tearaway. This may lead to something later on, Mr. Clever Mellish.'

Charles Devereux followed the lead given him by Joe Shap, and backed Tearaway.

By this time the horses were saddled and ready to go on to the course, and were filing out at the paddock gate.

Strange as it may appear, men like Devereux are often known and tolerated by men who hold good positions on the turf, and ought to be above having such acquaintances. The fascination of gleaning information about horses is, however, in many cases, irresistibly strong, and even such men as Devereux are not considered too far beneath contempt to receive hints from.

As Talisman passed out of the gate, one of the stewards, named Edmund Armidale, said to a friend:

‘Back Talisman. I am told it is a good thing.’

It so happened that Devereux heard this remark, and he knew Edmund Armidale was a Steward of the club, and also owned horses. He had only spoken to Armidale on one occasion, and that was on behalf of a jockey who did not care to approach him himself.

It mattered little to Charles Devereux, however, whether he knew a man or otherwise. There is a sort of freedom amongst men in widely different stations in life which only exists on the racecourse. A man will often be found conversing with someone on a racecourse whom he would not recognise elsewhere.

When Devereux touched Edmund Armidale on the arm, the latter looked at him in surprise. Had Devereux accosted him in the street, he would have walked on and ignored him; but here on the race-

course it was different, and Armidale somehow fancied he had seen him before.

‘What do you want?’ he asked.

‘I happened to hear you tell your friend to back Talisman.’

‘Well?’ said Armidale haughtily, as much as to say, ‘What business is it of yours?’

‘Talisman won’t win.’

‘What do you know about it?’

‘I know this much: Talisman is not a trier. Mellish has backed Tearaway; I saw him give a man the money to do it.’

‘Why do you tell me this?’

‘Because you once spoke up for a jockey I came to see you about.’

‘Ah! I recollect. Your name is——? let me see.’

‘Devereux—Charles Devereux.’

‘Very well, then, Mr. Devereux. Let me tell you, I do not believe the owner of Talisman would give orders for his horse not to win.’

‘I never said he had done so,’ replied Devereux. ‘I said Mellish had backed Tearaway, and Talisman is in his stable.’

‘Come along; we shall miss the race,’ said Armidale’s friend. ‘Who is that fellow?’

‘Some sharper, from his looks. He says Tearaway will win.’

‘St. Rollox told me the same thing. We ought to have a trifle on.’

‘As you please. I’ll go halves with you,’ said Edmund Armidale.

Charles Devereux watched Mr. Armidale’s friend go back into the Ring, and thought to himself:

‘The bait has taken. Mark Mellish may hear more about this.’

CHAPTER XII

A CLEVER WIN

IT was a good race for the Randwick Plate—exciting enough for the short time it lasted, like most six-furlong sprints. The twenty-four horses were ranged up behind the starting - machine, and when the barrier flew up, the start was perfect. The antiquated system of starting horses had long been banished from the colonial racecourses, to the vast advantage of everyone concerned.

At the end of the first furlong Monteagle carried his light weight to the front, and made the pace hot. It was soon evident he was not to steal a march upon the remainder of the field, for he did not gain perceptibly upon his first advantage.

Murchison, who generally rode for Mark Mellish when he could ‘get’ the weight, was on the back of Talisman, and he was determined to take the measure of the other horses in the race. The jockey knew Talisman was not thoroughly wound up, and Sam

Sandycroft said to him before he got into the saddle:

‘Don’t bustle him, Ted; he’s not as fit as he might be. I want you to look after several others in the race; it will come in useful later on. Win if you can, but do not ride him out if you see you have no chance at the distance.’

Talisman was, however, going so well at the end of four furlongs that Murchison began to think he had a chance of winning. Tearaway was racing alongside him, Monteagle was a good two lengths in front, and Burwah, Omrah, and one or two more were all lying handy.

Alec Moss, a clever jockey, was on the back of Tearaway; and although he meant to win, he had no intention, if it could be avoided, of allowing Ted Murchison, or any other jockey, to get the ‘full strength’ of his mount.

St. Rollox had confidence in Moss, and it was not misplaced. He was a generous employer, and when he won, gave with a liberal hand. He did this because it paid him; that was the extent, or the foundation, of his generosity. There are many men like St. Rollox in this respect. True generosity demands no return. The generosity, so-called, of business men—men of the world—demands an adequate return.

Alec Moss had on more than one occasion been indebted to St. Rollox for the advance of considerable sums of money. Jockeys are not supposed to bet,

but they do, and no Stewards of any Jockey Club in the world will ever find out the way to stop them.

Alec Moss was fond of a gamble, but the worst of it was, he sometimes did not back the horse he rode, but some other animal in the race. It is one thing for a jockey to back his own mount, and quite another thing for him to wager on a horse running against him. Practically, this amounts to his betting against the horse he is riding, which even the uninitiated must comprehend is not desirable, or conducive to honesty.

St. Rollox treated his jockey well, and he had no cause to complain of Alec Moss, if other owners had. It was well known to Moss that the owner of Tearaway wished to win this race, and then land a big *coup* over the Newmarket Handicap. If Tearaway only just won, the result would not have much influence on the Newmarket race in the eyes of the public, but if he won easily, there would at once be conjectures as to how much he had 'in hand.'

Moss was keeping a wary eye on Talisman, and also glancing ahead at Monteagle. His practised eyes soon saw he had Monteagle safe, but he was a trifle doubtful about Talisman and Omrah.

The next furlong settled the pretensions of Monteagle, and then Talisman shot to the front with a clear lead.

'I'll find out what Alec's up to,' thought Murchison.

‘I fancy he’s kidding; but he can’t try that on with me.’

It was a surprise to Moss when Talisman shot ahead so suddenly, and for a moment he thought Tearaway would be beaten. This idea was quickly dispelled, for Tearaway went after Talisman at a great pace.

‘That’s all right,’ thought Moss. ‘I’ve got ’em all safe now.’

Devereux’s ‘tip’ had not been lost on Edmund Armidale, for when he saw Talisman draw clear of the field, he thought :

‘That sharper was wrong, and I was a fool to take notice of him.’

No sooner, however, had this reflection occurred to him than Talisman commenced to fall back in a very strange manner, at least so thought Edmund Armidale.

To Mark Mellish, Herbert Verney, and Sam Sandycroft, Talisman’s collapse was nothing extraordinary, for the trainer thought the horse would hardly last out the race. Sam Sandycroft was perfectly satisfied with the way in which Talisman was running, and also with the riding of Murchison.

‘Ted’s doing the right thing,’ thought Sam; ‘he finds out he can’t win, and there is no occasion to get a place.’

‘The roar of the Ring’ was in favour of Talisman,

but there was a sudden lull when Verney's horse fell back and Tearaway drew level with him.

St. Rollox's horse was favourite, and nothing stills the roar of the bookmakers quicker than the prospects of the favourite getting home first. The effect is truly remarkable and must be heard to be believed.

It was not, however, Moss's intention to win easily, so he kept Tearaway in hand, and the pair appeared to be making a race of it.

Meanwhile Omrah had been creeping up on the rails, and there was much consternation expressed upon the faces of the backers of Tearaway and Talisman, as they saw it was within the bounds of probability, and possibility, that Omrah's jockey would catch the other two 'napping' and snatch the victory on the post.

Moss, however, was not often caught 'napping'; it had happened to him on one occasion and he paid for it dearly. The jockey had not lost sight of Omrah. He was quite aware Omrah's jockey was chuckling to himself, and rejoicing in a foretaste of unexpected victory, but he knew he could dash that cup out of his hand at any moment.

Omrah, Tearaway, and Talisman seemed locked together at the half distance.

The sky-blue jacket of Herbert Verney was the first to fall back, and then for one brief moment the red with the black cap of Omrah's jockey was in front.

The bookmakers found their voices again and inflated their lungs, ready to shout Omrah's name. It would be a rare turn up for the Ring if Omrah won, and at this particular moment it looked like it.

Moss, however, was calmly waiting for his favourite finish. The sporting pressmen often chronicled how 'Moss, after riding one of his clever but somewhat risky finishes, got up in the last stride and won by a head.'

The jockey seldom made a mistake in a finish of this kind. He had iron nerves, a clear head, was an exceptionally good judge of pace, and knew to a fraction how far he could depend upon the horse he was riding. He had often got the primrose jacket and rose cap home by a head for St. Rollox, and that was what he meant to do on Tearaway.

A set to between a couple of racehorses within a few strides of the winning-post compresses into a second or two a variety of intense emotions. Anxiety, exultation, sudden depression, the rise and fall of hopes and fears, all seem blended in a confusion that, strange to say, is not at all unpleasant. The man who has once felt the effects of a 'close finish' seldom forgets it, and win or lose, he generally remembers it with pleasure.

Omrah and Tearaway fought out the battle to the bitter end, and to the crowd it seemed a genuine struggle for victory. Moss brought Tearaway with a

terrific rush and won on the post by 'that favourite head of his,' as a backer of the favourite put it.

It made many thousands of pounds' difference to the Ring, Tearaway's victory, but bookmakers are philosophical, and know they have only to 'stay' long enough to come into their own again.

St. Rollox was delighted at the result, for he had not only won a good stake, but knew he possessed a good horse.

'Had you much in hand?' he asked Moss in the paddock.

'Yes, I had a bit up my sleeve,' replied the jockey with a twinkle in his eyes. 'Walsh thought he had me safe enough on Omrah, but he had not the ghost of a show. Tearaway is a rattling good horse, and I think he'll win the Newmarket Handicap for you. Talisman ran well, but he has no chance of beating Tearaway at Flemington.'

Edmund Armidale knew Herbert Verney, and meeting him on the Club stand after the race said:

'I'm sorry you did not win. Talisman seemed to die away strangely at the finish. I thought he would have won easily at the distance.'

'Hardly wound up,' replied Herbert placidly. 'Sandycroft told me before the race the horse was not quite fit and he did not think he would last it out. I only had fifty on him.'

'You train with Mellish, don't you?'

'Yes,' replied Herbert.

‘Are you quite sure of your ground? I know Mark Mellish is a good sort, but bookmakers have so many curious ideas of what is allowable in racing.’

‘I have every confidence in Mellish, and also in his trainer,’ said Herbert; ‘but why do you ask such a question?’

‘Merely from something I heard before the race,’ said Armidale.

‘May I ask what you heard?’

‘Certainly. I was told Mellish had backed Tearaway, and that Talisman was not on it. I indignantly denied you would give orders for your horse not to win, and in reply was informed that you were not in fault, but Mellish,’ said Armidale.

‘You Stewards are suspicious,’ laughed Herbert, ‘and I have no doubt you are right to be so at times, but in this case you are wide of the mark.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said Armidale. ‘Mind, I never for one moment thought you would do anything wrong, but I do not know Mellish as well as I know you.’

‘Let me explain,’ said Herbert. ‘Mellish had a hundred on Tearaway, but he laid St. Rollox seven monkeys and only backed Tearaway to save his book a little. He did not lay Talisman, and as a matter of fact he never lays any horses trained in his stable.’

Edmund Armidale felt relieved, and was rather ashamed of himself for having taken notice of such a

man as Devereux. The running of Talisman was, however, the subject of a good deal of remark, and it was quite evident many people thought Herbert Verney's horse could have been much nearer the winner.

Herbert Verney heard some of the remarks passed, and was thoroughly disgusted to think his colours should be made the subject of unfavourable comment.

'It makes me sick of the whole business, and I have a great mind to throw up racing,' he said to Mark Mellish.

The bookmaker was sorely troubled about the hints thrown out as to Talisman's running. He knew how suspicious many people are of bookmakers and their doings, and that was the reason he never laid against his own horses, but always ran them for his book.

'I am afraid,' he said to Herbert Verney, 'it is because Talisman was trained in my stable that these uncharitable remarks are made—people are so suspicious of bookmakers,' he added bitterly.

'Look here, Mark, drop that,' said Herbert Verney. 'No man has a greater respect for you than I have, and, by George! I'll stick to you—that is, if you will let me. Give up racing, will I? Not after what you have said. I will show these scandalmongers I have more faith in your honesty than in their pitiful, mean stories.'

Mark Mellish felt a glow of pride as he listened to Herbert Verney's indignant words.

‘I will give you my assurance——’ he commenced, when Herbert, interrupting, said :

‘I don’t need it, Mark. Man alive ! what do you take me for ? Do you suppose because a lot of howling idiots think ill of you that makes one iota difference to me ? I’m not a friend of that kind, I hope.’

Later on Herbert Verney, still wrathful, met Edmund Armidale again, and said :

‘I want you to do me a favour.’

‘What is it ?’

‘Who gave you the information about Talisman and Mark Mellish ? An answer to that question is my favour.’

Edmund Armidale did not care to tell Herbert Verney he had been influenced by such a man as Devereux, but he saw no way out of answering his question.

‘I can tell you if you wish,’ he said, ‘but it is a matter of no importance. No one with a grain of sense believes Talisman was not a trier.’

‘But it is of importance,’ said Herbert. ‘It must be some fellow who has a down on Mark Mellish, and as he is a friend of mine, and I have every confidence in him, and mean to have, I do not choose to hear him maligned.’

‘You have no occasion to be so wroth about it,’ said Armidale. ‘As a matter of fact, I ought not to have taken any notice of what the man said, but if

you think it is he who has put it about that Mellish did not act straight, I will tell you his name.'

'It must be the same man,' said Herbert. 'I will ask Mellish if he knows him. What is his name?'

'Charles Devereux,' said Armidale. 'He is not a very desirable character. Perhaps I had better explain how he gave me the information that Mellish had backed Tearaway.'

Edmund Armidale then gave Herbert a brief account of how Devereux accosted him, and what he said.

'Then you may depend upon it he did so in order to throw suspicion upon Mark Mellish,' said Herbert.

'I confess it looks like it,' said Armidale. 'Why, there is the very man!' he exclaimed; and pointed out Charles Devereux to Herbert.

CHAPTER XIII

TRAINER AND JOCKEY

'Do you know a man named Charles Devereux?' Herbert Verney asked Mark Mellish.

'Yes,' replied the bookmaker, 'and I know nothing good of him.'

'It was this man who put about the report that you backed Tearaway, and that Talisman was not a trier,' said Herbert.

‘Then I am surprised anyone believed him,’ replied Mark.

He then told Herbert Verney what had passed between himself and Devereux.

‘And if that is the sort of man backers of horses believe, I am not surprised they have a bad opinion of bookmakers.’

‘I should have thought Armidale had more self-respect than to listen to the fellow,’ said Herbert.

‘Some Stewards are not above gaining information from shady characters,’ replied Mark. ‘If Stewards had more knowledge of racing, and exercised a little common-sense, they would not commit so many blunders.’

‘Who is this fellow Devereux?’ asked Herbert.

‘I have never been able to find out. I believe he is a man of some education, and came out from England many years ago. As far as I can make out, he has knocked about the country a good deal, and I have seen him at Bathurst races and at pigeon matches once or twice. I recollect he won money over Barnes at Bathurst one day. You know Barnes is a first-rate pigeon shot—hit ’em hard in Melbourne one year. He told me he had no idea who Devereux was, but that he knew he backed the gun heavily at pigeon matches when the shooter was anything out of the common. I should not bother my head about Devereux; he’s not worth it, and he can do neither of us any harm.’

‘There’s no telling what a man like that is capable of,’ replied Herbert, ‘and I shall keep a look-out for him.’

The result of the Randwick Handicap was encouraging to Sam Sandycroft. That astute individual had a consultation with Ted Murchison the Sunday morning following the race.

The trainer always found the quiet of Sunday morning conducive to thought. There was a peculiar restfulness about the day that pleased him. He rested both himself and his horses on Sunday, and felt the better for it during the remainder of the week.

Ted Murchison knew Sandycroft’s habits well, so he said nothing to him after the race about Talisman’s running, but on Sunday morning strolled from his cottage at Waverley down to Randwick, and called at the trainer’s house.

Sam Sandycroft expected him, although no arrangement had been made for the jockey to call, and it was not necessary between men who knew each other so well.

‘I think we managed everything very well in the handicap,’ began Sam.

‘Couldn’t have been better,’ replied the jockey.

‘Moss rode a capital race on Tearaway,’ said Sam.

‘Think so?’ answered the jockey.

‘Yes. Don’t you?’

‘No.’

‘Why?’

‘I’ll tell you.’

‘Fire away.’

They spoke like men who cannot waste time on many words.

‘In the first place,’ said Murchison, ‘he showed me his hand. I saw his little game from the four-furlong post. I thought then I had a chance, and took a feeler at them. Moss, however, soon shot Tearaway out, and when he raced him alongside Talisman I knew I could not beat him. That was my opportunity. I saw Moss thought Talisman had a chance by the way he was riding, so I did not bustle him. Moss kept Tearaway handy because he did not want to win easily. The consequence was I got the full strength of his mount. In the second place he made a mistake in letting Omrah run him such a close finish. I could have beaten Omrah.’

‘Then you could have won,’ said Sam. ‘Why did you not do so?’

‘I could not have won. Had I ridden Talisman out when Moss caught me, Tearaway would have won easily, because Talisman would not have lasted it out. Under the circumstances I thought the best thing I could do would be to take Tearaway’s measure.’

‘And you did?’

‘Yes.’

‘What’s the measure?’

‘We’ll beat him at Flemington.’

‘Reason for doing so?’ said Sam.

‘Because I am certain Tearaway could not have beaten Omrah by more than a length.’

‘And Talisman could have beaten Omrah?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then, as I said before, you ought to have won.’

‘You are out in your reckoning this time,’ said Murchison.

‘How so?’

‘You told me Talisman was not thoroughly fit. Now, if I had come along at top speed when we had gone four furlongs, he would have shut up at the end of the next furlong. Do you see that?’

‘It is probable.’

‘I rode the horse.’

‘You did ; there’s no gainsaying that,’ replied Sam.

‘And I say he would have stopped at the end of five furlongs. But as I did not ride him hard, he lasted the race out much better than he otherwise would have done.’

‘That’s so,’ replied Sam.

‘Tearaway could not have gone much faster, and he was fitter than Talisman,’ went on the jockey. ‘If Tearaway was fit, then I say Talisman, who was not wound up, will beat him in the Newmarket Handicap.’

‘Your reasoning is good,’ said Sam, ‘but you have made one mistake. Moss says Tearaway had a good bit in hand at the finish. Never mind how I found that out ; I know he said it.’

‘Then Moss is wrong,’ replied Murchison. ‘I’ll bet on that.’

‘Moss is no fool,’ said the trainer.

‘Am I?’ asked Murchison.

‘Certainly not,’ replied Sam.

‘Then my opinion is quite as good as his.’

‘But he rode Tearaway, not you,’ said the trainer.

‘And what if he did?’ replied the jockey. ‘You haven’t known me all these years without being aware I have my eyes open when I am riding in a race?’

‘We are all liable to make mistakes,’ said Sam.

‘I tell you there is no mistake. Take my word for it, Sam, we shall beat ’em all in the Newmarket Handicap—if *you* have made no mistake.’

‘Me!’ exclaimed the trainer.

‘I alluded to you, Sam.’

‘Hang it all! what mistake could I have made?’

‘You told me Talisman was not wound up. He may have been, and if so, he will not win at Flemington.’

‘Ted, you’re a fool!’ said the trainer. ‘Don’t you think I know when a horse is fit, and when he is not, especially when I have trained him?’

‘And don’t you think I know a good deal about a horse when I ride him in a race?’ asked Ted.

‘I’ll give you credit for that,’ replied Sam; ‘but there are a lot of jockeys who think they know more than the trainer.’

‘We will not argue that point,’ said Murchison. ‘We have tried that before, and nothing came of it.’

‘You fellows get all the credit,’ said Sam. ‘I’d like to know where you would be if we did not train the horses properly for you.’

‘And where would you be when they were trained if we did not ride them well?’ said Sam.

There was a step on the veranda, and a voice said :

‘At it again! Remember, it is Sunday morning, and you ought to calm down.’

It was Mark Mellish, who had come upon them unawares during the heat of their argument.

‘Ted’s a good jockey,’ said the trainer, ‘but he’s terribly obstinate.’

The jockey laughed as he replied :

‘I think Mr. Mellish has a good idea where the bulk of the obstinacy lies.’

‘I’ll not decide that point now,’ laughed Mark. ‘What was the argument about?’

‘Trainers *versus* jockeys,’ said Sam.

‘Jockeys *versus* trainers,’ retorted Ted.

‘There, didn’t I tell you what an obstinate beggar he is! He always places jockeys before trainers, and he always will—that’s his one great fault.’

‘I think you are on an equality,’ said Mark; ‘for each of you stands pretty near at the head of his profession.’

This remark soothed all jealousy, which at the

worst was never serious, and seldom caused much dispute.

The trainer gave Mark Mellish the jockey's opinion of the race for the Randwick Handicap, and the bookmaker said :

'Then Talisman ought to have a big chance in the Newmarket. I am glad of that, for I want Mr. Verney to win a few races. He is a fine young fellow, and it will give him a lot of pleasure.'

Ruth Fitzroy entered the room. Mark Mellish admired Ruth, and so did the jockey, and both expressed their pleasure at seeing her.

Ruth liked the bookmaker because she knew he was a man to be respected, and also because the trainers placed such confidence in him. Mark was considerably older than Ruth, but he did not look his age.

'I heard a desperate argument going on before you came in and brought peace with you,' said Ruth to Mark Mellish. 'I am afraid the combatants would have had to be forcibly separated but for your timely arrival.'

'Had the affair reached such a climax?' asked Mark, laughing.

'I am afraid so,' she answered.

'Don't talk nonsense, Ruth!' said the trainer. 'We were merely talking over the result of the Randwick Handicap.'

'And I hope you arrived at a satisfactory decision,' she said.

'We had not much difficulty about that,' said the jockey.

'I am sorry you lost on Talisman,' said Ruth.

There was a peculiar smile on the jockey's face as he answered :

'Sometimes a loss turns out in the end as profitable as a win.'

'I hope it will in this case,' said Ruth.

Sam Sandycroft was looking daggers at the jockey. He never mentioned stable secrets before Ruth.

Mark saw the trainer's anxiety and smiled. He knew what a horror Sam Sandycroft had of jockeys talking too much.

Murchison, however, did not see the trainer's black looks, and continued innocently, in answer to Ruth's words :

'I am sure Talisman will show he was not at his best in that race.'

Sam Sandycroft dropped a glass on to the floor, where it smashed with a crash.

'You careless man !' laughed Ruth, as she stooped to pick up the pieces.

'Shut up !' said Sam across the table to the jockey.

'Did you speak to me ?' asked Ruth.

'No ; I told Ted to fill up,' said Sam, with a wink at the jockey.

When Ruth took the broken glass out of the room, Sam said to him : ' I wish you'd keep your tongue still, and not talk about the horses in front of people.'

‘What harm can it do? Miss Fitzroy is one of the family.’

‘Of course she is,’ said Sam.

‘Then where’s the harm?’

‘Never mind where; I don’t like it. That is quite sufficient. Least said soonest mended.’

Mark Mellish laughed as he said:

‘You are over-cautious, Sam, but it is a good fault.’

‘I have found that out from experience,’ replied the trainer. ‘The more a man talks, the more trouble he causes himself and others.’

Ruth did not return. She put on her hat and went down the road towards Coogee.

As she passed his house St. Rollox saw her, and putting on his hat, followed her. They walked down to the bay together and seemed on very good terms with each other.

St. Rollox had a way of ingratiating himself with the ladies which was not lost upon Ruth. She was a good-looking, stylish girl, and he always had eyes for both qualities.

Ruth Fitzroy pleased his somewhat jaded taste. He had been made much of by women, if not by men, and their attentions had caused him to weary of them. Ruth was fresh and outspoken, and her conversation lively and piquant.

When he thought it worth his while, St. Rollox could be a pleasant companion, and he had exerted

himself to make a favourable impression upon Ruth. He so far succeeded that he dispelled any fear of him she had had upon their first chance acquaintance. He was polite and attentive to her, and Ruth saw he wished to put her entirely at her ease.

They stood looking over the sea wall, at the ocean, and the passing coastal steamer on its way from Melbourne to Sydney. Their conversation was commonplace and dwelt upon topics connected with their surroundings. St. Rollox knew Ruth Fitzroy was not the sort of girl who would be pleased with vain, empty compliments, and he refrained from paying them.

When he left the trainer's house Mark Mellish went down to the bay to get a breath of sea air. He did not know Ruth Fitzroy was acquainted with St. Rollox.

As he crossed the tram lines he saw St. Rollox and Ruth apparently deeply engrossed in conversation, standing near the sea wall.

He was startled when he saw them, although after a moment's thought he did not see any reason why he should be so. It was only natural that living near each other they should meet and become acquainted. He had, however, never heard Sam Sandycroft mention that Ruth knew St. Rollox. Perhaps the trainer did not consider it of sufficient importance.

It was no business of his, and so far as he was aware there was no reason why Leo St. Rollox and

Ruth Fitzroy should not be acquainted. All the same, he was both ill at ease and ill-pleased at seeing them together.

CHAPTER XIV

STRANGE QUESTIONS

ROBERT INSCH took the hint Herbert Verney gave him, and worked hard at the buggies he was building for Mark Mellish.

He finished two in his best style, and forwarded them to Sydney, and was delighted to receive a letter from Mark praising him highly for the way in which he had turned them out. A little encouragement went a long way with Bob Insch, and it had been scarce with him of late. No doubt it was entirely his own fault that he was more often blamed than praised, but had he been handled in a more kindly manner he would probably have done better. There is not much romance about buggy-building, and Bob Insch was by no means given to romancing. There was, however, something out of the common in many of his thoughts and movements since Herbert Verney had said he would pay a thousand pounds for the discovery of the man who murdered his uncle.

Bob Insch, although he paid frequent visits to the Kelso Arms, seldom indulged too freely, much to Fletcher Norham's gratification. Insch took notice

of everything going on in the hotel, and listened attentively to the conversation.

He commenced his detective experiment by trying to hold his tongue and glean information from other people. He knew very well, from personal experience, that men in their cups talk freely, and often speak the truth by mistake.

The police had not made any further discoveries in regard to the affair at The Fells, although they were as eager as ever to obtain a clue.

Philip Thwaites was a frequent visitor at the Kelso Arms, and often met Bob Insch there. The two men were not on very friendly terms, and the conduct of Thwaites did not tend to increase their cordial relations. Strange to say, Philip Thwaites was always partial to talking about the death of John Verney, and when in a babbling mood sometimes let slip a word or two which suggested he knew something of importance if he chose to speak about it.

One night Bob Insch, on entering the Kelso Arms, found Philip Thwaites in a more talkative mood than usual. He was harping on the old tale of John Verney's murder, and Insch heard him say:

'The police are not half wide awake. They content themselves with the evidence given at the inquest, and go solely upon that.'

'And what else have they to go upon?' asked Joe Shap.

'That they must discover,' said Thwaites; 'but

if the evidence at the inquest was insufficient, one would have given them credit for thinking it would be advisable to go upon another tack.'

Bob Insch sat quietly down in a corner of the room, but did not speak until Joe Shap, who caught sight of him, said :

'What's your opinion, Bob? Do you think the police are doing their best?'

'Yes, I think so,' replied Bob.

'Much you know about it,' said Philip Thwaites. 'You were never gifted with much common-sense.'

'I can return that compliment,' said Bob quietly.

'Perhaps you are clever enough to have formed a theory of your own on the question,' sneered Thwaites.

'I have,' was the unexpected reply.

Philip Thwaites laughed as he said :

'Tell us your theory; it will be amusing, at all events.'

'I do not think it would amuse *you*,' said Bob, looking steadily at him, and laying stress upon the last word.

Philip Thwaites was somewhat taken aback, and did not immediately answer.

'Why don't you think it would amuse him?' asked Joe Shap.

'Because he has no sense of humour,' replied Bob; but his reply was not convincing that this was his real reason.

Philip Thwaites became suddenly silent : he seemed to have lost his power of speech, and shuffled uneasily under Bob Insch's steady gaze. He recollected the gist of the conversation he had with Insch when Herbert Verney interrupted them. On that occasion Bob Insch had made a pointed allusion to his (Thwaites's) being away from home on the night of the murder. Was it possible the carriage-builder suspected he knew more about John Verney's death than he cared to say ? The mere thought of this caused Thwaites to shudder, and feeling uncomfortable in his present position, he went outside.

Much to the surprise of those present, Bob Insch followed him.

'There's something up between them,' said Joe Shap, nodding his head in the direction of the door.

'There always has been, ever since Bob's daughter made such a mistake as to marry Philip Thwaites,' said Fletcher Norham. 'She'd have made a far better deal if she'd taken Mark Mellish.'

'I should think so,' said Joe Shap. 'Mark's one of the right sort. I told you how he treated me at Randwick, after I put that money on.'

'You said you put a hundred on Tearaway for him, that was all,' said Norham.

'He gave me twenty pounds for doing it,' said Joe, 'although he was pretty hard hit over the result.'

'Mark was always generous,' said Norham.

'And then, after the races, some fellow called

Devereux put it about that Mark arranged for Tearaway to win instead of 'Talisman,' said Joe.

'Devereux—Charles Devereux?' asked Fletcher Norham.

'The very man!' replied Joe. 'Do you know him?'

'Yes, he has stayed here several times,' said Norham. 'He's a man I do not care about—an unprincipled sort of fellow, I should say. He generally puts up here for the races, but I much prefer his room to his company.'

'He seems to have a dislike to Mark,' said Joe Shap.

'Devereux is not the sort of man Mark Mellish would be likely to have for a friend,' said Norham.

'Do you know anything about this Devereux?' said Joe Shap. 'I think Mr. Verney would like to tell him a bit of his mind for trying to injure Mark.'

'I cannot say I know much about him,' replied Norham, 'and what I do know is not to his credit. He was caught cheating at cards here one night, and would have been roughly handled had I not interfered.'

'I should have left him to his fate,' replied Joe.

'So I would have done, but it might have got me into trouble with the police.'

'Where does he hail from?' asked Joe.

'I did hear he came from England, but wherever

he came from, you may be certain it was no benefit to this country when he landed here.'

'There's lots more would have been better left behind,' said Joe. 'There's a precious sight too many good-for-nothing fellows out here.'

Philip Thwaites was walking along the road when Bob Insch caught up to him.

'I want to have a word with you,' said Bob.

'And I have no time for fooling around with you,' replied Thwaites.

'Then you will have to make time, or it will be the worse for you,' said Insch.

'I have had enough of your insinuations for one night,' said Philip Thwaites. 'What did you mean by saying you did not think your theory about John Verney's death would amuse me?'

'I meant what I said. Would you like to hear my theory?'

'No.'

'I thought as much.'

Philip Thwaites walked on and would have left Bob Insch, but he did not mean to be shaken off in this way.

'Will you answer me a question or two?' said Bob.

'It depends what they are.'

'You are my daughter's husband, more's the pity, and for the sake of her and Olive I do not wish to do you any harm,' said Bob quietly.

‘What the deuce do you mean,’ said Thwaites, stopping. ‘What harm can you do me?’

‘None, I hope ; but answer my questions. The first is, What were you doing on Kelso Bridge the night John Verney’s horse, Hereward, fell into the river?’

‘I was not on the bridge when the horse fell into the Macquarie,’ said Philip Thwaites in a hoarse voice.

‘The second question,’ said Bob Insch, ignoring his denial, ‘is, What time did you leave The Fells that night?’

Philip Thwaites staggered back as though he had received a blow.

‘The third question is,’ went on Bob Insch relentlessly, ‘Why did you not come forward and give evidence at the inquest?’

There was no reply from Philip Thwaites. He seemed dumb with amazement and fear.

‘Can you answer me those questions?’ asked Bob Insch.

Philip Thwaites, by a great effort, recovered himself and replied :

‘Answer them? Of course I can. There is only one answer to give. I was not at The Fells that night!’

‘I say you were there!’ replied Bob.

‘Then you know more than I do,’ was the reply.

‘I know more than you think,’ said Bob Insch.

‘Tell me what you imagine you know.

‘Not until you answer my questions.’

‘I have answered them.’

‘You have not told me the truth ; your manner tells me that, even if I did not know your denial to be false,’ said Bob Insch.

‘And suppose I was at The Fells that night ?’ asked Thwaites.

‘Then why did you not come forward at the inquest and speak out ?’ said Bob.

‘I’ll tell you the whole truth if you will not say a word about it,’ replied Philip Thwaites.

‘Tell me the truth, and I will act as I think best.’

‘No, not without your promise to keep silent.’

‘Then I shall inform the police.’

‘Of what ?’

‘Your presence at The Fells on the night John Verney was killed.’

‘You’ll not do that, Bob, for your daughter’s sake.’

‘I will if you do not tell me all.’

‘Not here. I can’t tell you here ; we may be overheard.’

They were standing near an old disused shed, and there was not light sufficient for them to see whether anyone was lurking about.

‘Then come round to my office,’ said Bob Insch, and they walked away together.

No sooner were they out of sight than a woman

stepped out from the shed and staggered across the road.

It was Ada Thwaites, but hardly recognisable for the moment, so changed had her features become during the last few minutes. Her face was a deathly white, and there was a look of terror in her eyes. She clasped her hands together and moaned a low sound of intense anguish and misery.

Philip Thwaites's wife had been out to visit a friend, when she heard the voices of her husband and father as she drew near to the back of the shed. She did not care to interrupt them, and was hurrying on when she heard her father say: 'What time did you leave The Fells that night?'

'The Fells! When was he at The Fells?' thought Mrs. Thwaites. Surely he had never been to see young Mr. Verney. If so, why had he gone? Could it have been anything connected with Olive?

Then came her father's next question: 'Why did you not come forward and give evidence at the inquest?'

Every drop of blood in Ada Thwaites' heart seemed to freeze as she heard that question.

The inquest! Then it must have been the night John Verney met his death that her husband was at The Fells.

The horror of this thought was too much for her, and she held on to the shed for support. She could not move or cry out; she seemed paralyzed. Then she

heard with awful distinctness the conversation that followed, which ended with her husband's words :

‘ Not here, I can't tell you here ; we may be overheard.’

There was fear, abject fear and entreaty, in his voice, and his wife felt if she could have died on the spot it would have been a merciful ending to her life.

She heard them move away and then staggered forward. She tried to think. There must be some mistake, some explanation. She could not have heard all. Her husband might not have been at The Fells that night. If he had been to see John Verney, he must have left long before the hour at which the——

‘ Is that you, Mrs. Thwaites ? Are you ill ? Can I be of any assistance ?’

It was Sergeant Peasley who spoke, and his voice added tenfold to her terrors.

‘ Has he heard them ?’ she thought.

Sergeant Peasley caught her by the arm and supported her, or she would have fallen.

‘ You seem very faint,’ he said.

With a desperate effort Mrs. Thwaites somewhat recovered her senses. There was imminent danger, and it nerved her as nothing else could possibly have done.

‘ Thank you, Sergeant,’ she said. ‘ I have not been very well lately. It is foolish of me to come out alone ; I have been subject to these fainting fits of late.’

‘I’m sorry for that,’ he said in a low tone, and mentally thought : ‘That brute Thwaites ill-uses her, I’m sure he does. But she’s not one to complain.’

Then aloud he added :

‘Let me see you home.’

‘Thank you,’ she answered ; ‘but I feel quite well again now. I shall soon be home. Have you seen my husband ?’

It was a question she felt she must ask. It seemed forced from her by a more powerful will than her own. She waited for his answer as though her life depended upon it.

‘I met him with your father a minute or two ago,’ he answered. ‘They were going down the street.’

She laughed hysterically, so intense was her feeling of relief. Sergeant Peasley had not heard their conversation.

He looked at her in some surprise and said :

‘Shall I run after them, and bring him back ?’

‘No. Please do not do that,’ she said.

‘I am sure you are ill,’ he said ; ‘do let me see you safely home.’

At last she consented, and it was well she did so, for what she had gone through proved more than she could bear, and before they had proceeded many steps Mrs. Thwaites fainted away.

Sergeant Peasley was a man equal to any emergency, and he soon restored her to consciousness. He knew she would not like anyone to see her in this state if

it could be helped, and he therefore carried her back into the shed.

Eventually he walked home with her, and did not leave her until he saw her safely inside with Olive, who was much concerned at her mother's appearance.

Mrs. Thwaites sank into a chair, and buried her face in her hands. Olive soothed and comforted her, but failed to understand what had happened.

'Mother, you seem very ill,' she said. 'Shall I send Alice for the doctor?'

'No, no, no!' said her mother, with a sob.

'Come to bed, mother dear,' said Olive. 'You are faint and weak. You can tell me all about it in the morning.'

'Yes, I will go to bed,' said Mrs. Thwaites absently.

Olive supported her mother upstairs, and led her gently towards her room. When Mrs. Thwaites reached the door, she started back with a look of dread in her eyes, and said, as she caught Olive by the arm :

'Not in there. I cannot sleep in there to-night. I will go to your room.'

'Very well, mother,' said Olive, humouring her, and wondering at this strange fancy.

CHAPTER XV

AN IMPROBABLE STORY

WHEN Bob Insch and his son-in-law arrived at the carriage works they went to the office. They were not likely to be interrupted at that time of the night, for business hours were over long ago.

The office stood some distance back from the road, and Bob Insch, taking the key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and they went inside.

‘Shall we have a light?’ said Bob. ‘You are not afraid of the light, are you?’

‘No. Why should I be?’ retorted Thwaites, who had recovered his lost courage as they walked along.

‘That’s best known to yourself,’ replied Bob; ‘but I thought I would ask you.’

He lighted the gas, but did not turn it on full.

‘Now you can begin,’ said Bob Insch.

‘Oh, there’s not much to tell,’ said Philip Thwaites, with an air of bravado. ‘Of course it gave me a bit of shock when you said you knew I had been at The Fells. I can easily explain why I went there, and at what time I came away.’

‘That is all I require to know,’ said Bob.

‘I went down to The Fells in the afternoon,’ commenced Thwaites.

‘Not much good doing that if you went to see John Verney,’ retorted Bob. ‘You know as well as

I do he never saw any one on business until after a certain hour.'

'I must tell my story my own way,' said Thwaites. 'I went down in the afternoon to see about selling some hay and corn for the horses. When I arrived, there was no one about. I went round to the stables and could make no one hear, and I saw John Verney's horse was out, because the door of the box was open. I thought this strange, but then, The Fells was always a strange place. I came away again, and walked down into Kelso, waiting until the time arrived when I could call on John Verney.

'When it became almost dark I was about to go along the road up to The Fells, when I heard a horse galloping. I hurried forward, and as I neared The Fell gates I saw in the dim light Hereward, John Verney's horse, dash past me. The horse was riderless, and fearing something had happened, I ran quickly up the drive to the house. There was no one about, but the front door stood wide open. I did not think this strange, because John Verney generally had the door of the house wide open until he retired for the night.

'Hearing no one about, and seeing the door of Mr. Verney's study ajar, I stepped inside and crept quietly up to it in order to see if he was there. Looking in, I saw him sitting at his desk, and as the light shone on him from the hall there was something about him that made me afraid. I stepped inside

and called him, but received no answer. I touched him, and found he was dead. You can imagine the shock it gave me. I had not much time to think; I hardly knew what to do. It occurred to me that if anyone found me there I should be in a very awkward position. There was no telling what might be suspected. What explanation could I give of my presence there? Leaving him, I hurried out of the house and down the road again. Strange to relate, Hereward must have galloped round the road leading to the meadows, because as I hurried along the horse went past me again. I was nearing Kelso Bridge then, and when I heard the crash I could not refrain from crying out.'

'Then it was you Mark Mellish heard cry out,' said Bob Insch.

'It might have been,' replied Philip Thwaites, 'although I was not "cursing and swearing" as he said at the inquest. The reason I did not come forward to give evidence at the inquest you can easily guess. I had no right to be in John Verney's house, and when I found him dead I ought to have given information to the police. I did not do so, and having kept my visit to The Fells a secret, I determined I would not volunteer any evidence.'

'What did you go to The Fells for?' asked Bob.

'To see John Verney about the mortgage on my place. I heard he was going to sell me up, or had threatened to do so,' said Philip Thwaites.

‘Then it was a lucky thing for you that Herbert Verney was of a different mind to his uncle,’ said Bob.

‘In one sense it was, but perhaps it would have been just as well for me if John Verney had foreclosed. There must have been a surplus from the sale, and with that I should have gone to Sydney and started making a book,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘Has it never occurred to you,’ said Bob Inch, ‘that if anyone discovered you had been at The Fells that night very ugly suspicions might arise against you?’

‘But no one is ever likely to discover it!’ exclaimed Thwaites.

‘I discovered it,’ replied Bob, ‘and you do not give me credit for being particularly smart.’

‘I can’t think how you found it out,’ said Thwaites.

‘I knew you were out that night,’ said Bob, ‘and when you bragged at the Kelso Arms that you knew something about the affair the police did not, I thought it strange. From hints you have let fall at times I came to the conclusion you really did know something about it. I should advise you not to talk so much, or you may get into serious trouble.’

‘What made you ask me those questions to-night?’ asked Philip Thwaites.

‘I wished to find out if you really did know anything about John Verney’s death,’ said Bob.

‘Then you only guessed I was at The Fells?’

‘That is all ; and it seems it was a pretty good guess.’

‘Then I call it a blackguardly thing to do, to trap a fellow like you have done,’ said Thwaites.

‘I have trapped you for your own safety, and to put you on your guard,’ said Bob Insch, stepping up to him, and looking him straight in the face. ‘Do you think I believe the cock-and-bull story you have told me ? Some parts of it may be true, but not all, that I will swear.’

‘You are a meddling fool ! You entrapped me into making a confession, and now you calmly tell me you do not believe my story. Why do not you believe it ?’

‘I will tell you if you wish,’ said Bob.

‘Out with it.’

‘First answer me another question.’

‘What is it ?’

‘Where did you get the money from to pay Fred Glen ?’

Philip Thwaites hesitated a few moments before he replied, and then said :

‘I did not come here to be catechized by you, and I’m hanged if I’ll stand it ! Do you suppose I can’t pay my debts if I care to do so ?’

‘I am certain you could not pay Fred Glen the week before John Verney’s death, and I am equally certain you paid him two hundred and fifty pounds the very day the inquest was held,’ said Bob Insch.

‘How do you know I could not pay him the week before?’

‘He came to me and said it was deuced hard lines that a man in your position could not pay him for corn you bought twelve months before. He said you had turned it into money, and made your profit, and he considered it scandalous you had not paid him.’

‘And what did you say?’

‘I told him you certainly ought to discharge such a debt, and advised him to ask you to settle with him at once,’ said Bob. ‘He did so, as you know, and you treated him in a very off-hand manner. He came back to me in a rage, and said he should take proceedings against you at once. I advised him to give you ten days to pay in, and he said he would do so, but not a day more. I met him the week following, and he smilingly told me you had paid him, and given him five pounds over the amount due as some recompense for keeping him out of his money so long. What I want to know is where you got the money to pay him.’

‘And what if I do not choose to tell you?’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘Then I shall form my own conclusions.’

‘And they are?’

‘That you have not told me the truth about John Verney’s death, and that you know more about it than you dare tell,’ said Bob Insch firmly.

‘Do you mean to insinuate I had a hand in John Verney’s death?’ asked Thwaites, in a passion.

‘I won’t go so far as that,’ said Bob Insch. ‘I must hope for the best, for your wife and daughter’s sake. What I do know is that you were at The Fells the night John Verney was murdered, and that you found two hundred and fifty pounds to pay Fred Glen a day or two after. I thank God no one knows this but myself,’ added Bob Insch solemnly.

‘Of course, if you suspect me, that is not my fault,’ said Philip Thwaites. ‘I swear to you I had no hand in John Verney’s death, and that what I have told you is true. I can say no more than that, and I repeat again I had no hand in John Verney’s death.’

‘It would look very black against you if everything came to light,’ said Bob Insch. ‘Do you suppose any jury would believe the tale you have told me?’

‘Jury!’ exclaimed Philip Thwaites with a shudder; ‘you don’t think it will come to that?’

‘If the police discover you were at The Fells the night John Verney was murdered, you will be committed for trial as safe as though you now stood in the dock,’ said Bob.

‘Then what am I to do?’ said Philip Thwaites, thoroughly frightened.

‘If your tale be true,’ said Bob Insch, ‘you have nothing to fear.’

‘But many an innocent man has been condemned,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘You have put yourself in the wrong by not making a clean breast of it from the first, and you will have to be very careful. I strongly advise you to leave Bathurst as soon as you can arrange to do so. You have nothing to fear from me, because you are my daughter’s husband, and I love Olive as my own child. What I have learned from you to-night has made a changed man of me. I shall never give way to drink again, and I strongly advise you to let the liquor alone. You have talked too much already for your own safety. There is another thing I may mention to you. Herbert Verney told me he would give a thousand pounds to the man who discovered the murderer of his uncle. It was the prospect of earning that thousand pounds that set me on to keep my eyes and ears open, and you see what a dull fellow like myself has done. If Herbert Verney offered me a thousand pounds if I discovered who killed his uncle, he may repeat that offer to others, and it will make them eager to track the man down.’

‘A thousand pounds!’ said Philip Thwaites, half to himself.

‘Yes, that is the amount he said he would give me,’ said Bob Insch.

‘It is a lot of money. A thousand pounds would give a fellow a good start,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘There’s more than yourself will be of that way of thinking,’ replied Bob Insch.

'I wonder if he would make that offer to me,' said Philip Thwaites.

'To *you* !' exclaimed Bob Insch, in amazement.

'Yes. Why should not I have a try to find this man ?' replied Thwaites.

Bob Insch had recovered from his surprise. He suspected this was a move on the part of Philip Thwaites to put him off the scent, but he merely replied :

'You can ask Mr. Verney, of course. I have no doubt he would make the offer to you. If you take my advice you will steer clear of Herbert Verney.'

'And leave you to try and secure his thousand pounds,' said Philip Thwaites.

'I shall make no further effort to secure it,' was Bob Insch's reply.

'Have you anything more to say to me?' asked Philip Thwaites.

'No, nothing more,' said Bob Insch sadly.

Philip Thwaites seldom showed any kindly feeling towards his father-in-law, but when he heard the sorrowful tones of Bob Insch's voice, and saw how deeply he was affected, he said :

'We have not been very good friends, and I have not been a good husband to your daughter, but I swear to you, Robert Insch, you misjudge me now ! I would not raise my hand against any man. Again

I say, I had no part in John Verney's death! Do you believe me ?'

'I will try and believe you,' said Bob Insch.

Philip Thwaites walked home in an agitated frame of mind. It had been a night of shocks and surprises to him. He was amazed at Bob Insch showing such astuteness, and at the same time was angry with him for trapping him.

'A thousand pounds!' he muttered, as he walked home, and it was evident his mind dwelt upon the reward Herbert Verney had offered Bob Insch.

Perhaps he thought this offer would bring danger to himself. He had acted unwisely in not coming forward and stating all he knew at the inquest. Why had he not done so? If his story, as told to Bob Insch, was true, he would have had nothing to fear, but now, if the ugly facts were brought to light and marshalled and arrayed by a legal mind, they would be very convincing against him. Whether his story was true or false, he was in much peril if it came to light. His concealment of the facts in his possession amounted almost to criminality. It was his bounden duty to tell all he knew, and he had held his peace and said nothing. Such silence, upon such a grave offence, and under such circumstances as might be proved against him, would be simply damning in a court of justice.

Philip Thwaites thought of all this as he neared his home, and it made him fearful for his safety.

Why had he not taken a bold course at first, and disarmed all suspicion by an open, straightforward manner? It was too late now. He could not go back: he must go forward, and hope for the best; and the best, he thought, would be to take Bob Insch's advice and steer clear of Herbert Verney.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SLEEP-WALKER'S QUESTION

IT was late when Philip Thwaites reached home, and he did not immediately go upstairs to bed. His nerves were upset, and he took a stiff glass of brandy to steady himself. He was soon tired of being alone, and the house seemed strangely silent. Before he went upstairs he took another glass of brandy, and then felt much better.

It was dark in his room, and he fumbled in his pocket, and, finding a solitary match, struck it, colonial wise, on his trousers, and lighted the gas. Then he saw his wife was not in his room, and he experienced another shock.

He knew she must have gone to bed, for there was no one downstairs, and she would not be likely to remain out until such a late hour.

‘Ada!’ he called, as he opened the door. ‘Where are you?’

He heard someone move in his daughter's room, and Olive, opening the door, came out. She was in her usual dress, and looked tired and troubled.

‘What is the matter?’ asked her father.

‘Mother is ill,’ said Olive. ‘She is asleep now, so I will come into your room and tell you what has happened.’

Philip Thwaites dreaded something, he knew not what, and said :

‘Why is she not in our room?’

‘I will tell you,’ replied Olive. ‘About two hours ago I heard a knock at the door, and, on opening it, saw Sergeant Peasley and mother outside. He said mother had been suddenly attacked with a fainting fit, and he thought it better to accompany her home. I thanked him, and then assisted her indoors. She sat down in a chair, moaning, and I thought she must be very ill, so I offered to send for the doctor. She declined to see anyone, and I suggested she should go to bed and rest, and then tell me what had happened in the morning.

‘We went upstairs together, and when she came to the door of your room she started back and said :

“Not in there. I cannot sleep in there to-night!”

‘I thought it very strange, but humoured her, and took her into my room. She has been very restless, but she is asleep now, and it will be better to let her rest until morning. I will sit up with her.’

Philip Thwaites failed to understand it all.

‘Where had she been?’ he asked.

Olive told him, and he asked:

‘Has she complained about fainting fits before?’

‘No,’ said Olive.

‘I wonder where Peasley found her,’ said Philip.

‘He did not say,’ replied Olive.

A faint noise was heard, and Olive, opening the door, saw her mother standing on the landing, looking round with a vacant stare.

‘Hush!’ she said to her father. ‘I think she is asleep. I must try and lead her back to bed without waking her.’

Philip Thwaites looked out at the door and shuddered as he saw the expression on his wife’s face. Her features were drawn, and there was not a vestige of colour in her face. Her lips seemed bloodless and compressed, and her eyes were wide open and dilated with horror.

‘She must have had a shock,’ he said to himself. ‘I wonder what has frightened her.’

Olive went to her mother, and taking her gently by the hand, tried to lead her back into the room.

Mrs. Thwaites did not move. She stood looking at her husband with wide, vacant eyes and commenced to mutter. At first indistinguishable sounds issued from her mouth, followed by a jumble of incoherent words. Then she stopped and gasped for breath.

‘I shall manage very well, thank you, Sergeant,’

she said in a low but clear voice, and put out her hand.

Olive tried again to lead her into the room, waiting patiently until she followed her freely. She had heard it was dangerous to awake a person sleep-walking.

'Hush!' said Mrs. Thwaites, and stood in a listening attitude.

The suspense was becoming unbearable to Philip Thwaites. After all he had gone through during the night, this last scene was too much for him.

'What time did you leave The Fells that night?' said Mrs. Thwaites, in a hollow voice.

The question came clear and thrilling, and Philip Thwaites started back in terror and amazement.

His wife was looking straight at him, and he could hardly bring himself to believe she was asleep.

'What time did you leave The Fells that night?'

Again came the question, spoken in hollow tones, which sounded like a voice from the grave.

'What does she mean, father?' asked Olive, looking from her mother to Philip Thwaites with frightened eyes.

There was an expression on her father's face she had never seen before—an expression of abject fear.

'I don't know,' said Philip Thwaites hoarsely. 'What can she mean? Take her back into your room, Olive.'

'Come, mother!' said Olive gently.

‘Not in there! No, not in there!’ said Mrs. Thwaites, still looking in the direction of her husband, who now stood in the doorway of his room.

Olive pulled her gently by the hand, and Mrs. Thwaites followed her. Once in the room, Olive had very little difficulty in putting her into bed again. Mrs. Thwaites sank back on the pillow exhausted, still in a deep sleep.

After waiting a few minutes, Olive opened the door and went on to the landing again, expecting to find her father there, but he had gone into his room and shut the door. Olive thought this rather unfeeling, but she knew he was selfish and generally looked after his own comfort first. She did not knock at his door, but went into her own room again, and sitting in a chair at her mother’s side fell asleep, tired out with the excitement she had undergone.

Philip Thwaites passed a terrible night. He did not go to bed, but paced his room, full of doubts and fears. He tried to sit down, but could not remain still for more than a few minutes together. What had his wife meant by those words: ‘What time did you leave The Fells that night?’

It was the question Robert Insch had asked him, and now, in her sleep, his wife repeated the very words. What did it mean? Had she been dreaming, and was that question the outcome of her dream, uttered in her sleep? That was hardly possible. Could she have overheard his conversation with Bob

Insch? No, that was too utterly improbable. And yet she had been out that night, and was brought home by Sergeant Peasley in a fainting condition. It was evident from her appearance she had received a severe shock. What had caused it?

Then Philip Thwaites remembered his wife was in the habit of visiting Mrs. Glen, and that Fred Glen's house was at the end of the town, and that on her return home she would probably pass by the shed where he and Bob Insch were talking. Could she have heard anything of their conversation? She must have done so, or why the question, 'What time did you leave The Fells that night?'

How those words rang in his ears! He cursed his folly for not telling the truth at the time, but he dared not do so. And now it would be a hundred times harder to make anyone believe him, even if he confessed and told the *whole* truth.

If his wife overheard that conversation near the shed, there would be no way of explaining it to her. She would not believe him even if he declared the truth. Bob Insch did not believe his tale, and Philip Thwaites felt certain his wife would condemn him. He railed at what he considered his misfortunes, at the injustice done him, forgetting he had brought his punishment upon himself. He had done wrong, and he must pay the penalty.

Suddenly Philip Thwaites sank into a chair and clutched the arms with both hands. Cold drops of

perspiration broke out upon his forehead, and his body shivered with the dread that had seized upon him. It occurred to him that Sergeant Peasley must have overheard this conversation near the shed. It was evident his wife had heard it, or some portions of it, and if so, Sergeant Peasley might also have heard them. Peasley brought his wife home in a half-fainting condition, and if, as he surmised, his wife heard what passed between himself and Bob Insch, she would probably have fainted from the shock. This being the case, Sergeant Peasley must have been on the spot almost at the same time. Philip Thwaites had not seen Sergeant Peasley as he walked along the street with Bob Insch.

‘If Sergeant Peasley overheard that conversation,’ Philip Thwaites said to himself, ‘it will be all up with me now, and I shall have to get out of it the best way I can.’

He wondered what he had better do. Would it be the safer plan to go and see Sergeant Peasley and tell him all he knew?

No, that would not do. Bob Insch had not believed his story, and the Sergeant was hardly likely to be more credulous than his father-in-law.

Towards morning Philip Thwaites, thoroughly exhausted, fell into a restless sleep in his chair. When he went down to breakfast, Olive was there, but not his wife.

‘How is your mother?’ he asked.

'Still very weak and ill,' said Olive. 'I think she is troubled in her mind about something, although what about I cannot imagine.'

'Troubled in her mind?' he echoed. 'She has nothing to trouble her mind that I know of.'

'I do not think she likes the idea of our going to Sydney,' said Olive.

'Nonsense!' he said impatiently. 'It will do us all good, a change, and I am tired and sick of staying here.'

A bell rang, and Olive said:

'That is mother's bell; I will go and see what she requires.' When she returned, she said to her father: 'Mother wishes to see you.'

Philip Thwaites hesitated. He dreaded what was coming, but he thought it would be better to put a bold face on it, and ascertain what his wife really had meant by asking the strange question of the night before. He followed Olive upstairs, and Mrs. Thwaites said, in a strangely calm voice:

'Olive, I wish to speak to your father alone for a few minutes.'

Olive left the room, closing the door after her, and Mrs. Thwaites, without looking at her husband, said:

'I heard, accidentally, a conversation between you and my father last night. I was returning from the Glens', and passed by that old shed. What did that conversation mean? Tell me the truth, Philip—tell

me the very worst. You may trust me; I am your wife.'

'Was that what gave you such a fright?' he asked, in an assumed tone of carelessness.

'That is a needless question to ask,' she replied coldly. 'Are you going to tell me the whole truth about that conversation, or shall I judge for myself?'

'Where did you meet Sergeant Peasley?' he asked.

'You have nothing to fear from Sergeant Peasley,' she said contemptuously; 'he did not hear the conversation.'

Her husband gave a sigh of relief, and said:

'I am glad of that. It might have been more difficult to explain matters to him than it will be to you.'

'Perhaps I shall not be so easy to convince as you think,' she said.

'I will tell you the truth,' he replied. 'I ought to have done so before. There is nothing to be afraid of.'

He then proceeded to tell his wife substantially the same story he had related to Bob Insch, and with somewhat similar effect. Mrs. Thwaites felt certain he was not telling her the whole truth. Something in his manner convinced her of this, and he had deceived her on so many occasions.

Her evident disbelief irritated him, and he said angrily:

'You can think what you like. I told your father

the same story, and you can compare notes if you wish.'

'And what did my father say?' she asked.

'He said he would try and believe what I had told him was true; but he is as big a fool as you are.'

'I may be a fool,' she replied, 'in your eyes, but I am not such a fool as you think.'

'I tell you I had no hand in John Verney's death.'

'That I must believe,' she said, 'or I could not live with you another day.'

'Do you not believe it fully and freely?' he asked. She did not answer him, and he said passionately: 'If you think my hands are soiled with John Verney's blood, you had better go your way and I will go mine.'

'If it were not for Olive's sake, I would do so,' she said.

'I am glad you have the sense to think of Olive. It would not be a wise move on your part to throw obstacles in her way,' he replied.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that if you wish Olive to make a good match, such as a marriage with Herbert Verney would be, you had better keep up appearances by still living with me, however distasteful it may be to you,' he said.

Mrs. Thwaites, raising herself from the bed, caught her husband by the arm, and said fiercely:

'Olive must break off all acquaintance with Herbert

Verney. *You* of all men ought to understand why, and you will have to help me to keep them apart.'

'I shall do nothing of the kind,' he said, shaking her hand off roughly.

'You will not?'

'No.'

'Then you are a worse man than even I thought you.'

'You never had a very good opinion of me. There is no reason why Herbert Verney should not marry Olive. He is half in love with her now, and she is fond of him, I am sure.'

'No reason why he should not marry her!' said his wife in surprise.

'None at all. Do you know of any?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said fiercely and defiantly. 'There is some mysterious connection between John Verney's death and your movements on that night, and if you cannot explain away every atom of suspicion attaching to yourself, then Herbert Verney and Olive must be kept as wide apart as it is possible for any human power to keep them.'

'And I say there is no mysterious connection between myself and John Verney. I made a mistake in not coming forward at the inquest—that is all. Why should my mistake wreck the chance of Olive's happiness?'

'Supposing she married him and he found out afterwards?' said Mrs. Thwaites, shuddering.

'Found out what? There is nothing to find out,' he said angrily.

'You must do as I wish,' she said, 'or I shall take matters into my own hands.'

'What do you wish?'

'To keep Olive and young Verney apart.'

'Then I shall not help you. It will be a good match if it comes off, and I shall do all in my power to bring it about.'

'And so you would sacrifice even your own daughter,' she said bitterly.

'What for?' he asked roughly. 'How sacrifice her?'

'By marrying her to Herbert Verney to save yourself,' she answered.

CHAPTER XVII

HERBERT VERNEY UNDERSTANDS HIMSELF

OLIVE was aware that something unusual, a quarrel of more than ordinary importance, had taken place between her father and mother; but knowing the relations that had existed between them for some years, she did not take the notice she might otherwise have done.

Differences of opinion had been of common occurrence between Philip Thwaites and his wife from an early stage in Olive's existence, and as a child

she remembered that they were constantly at variance. She deplored this, but, finding no remedy for it, had come to regard it as a misfortune that must always be taken into consideration in her future life.

To Olive her mother's conduct now seemed strange and inconsistent, for she had taken a violent and unaccountable dislike to Herbert Verney.

Her father combated this dislike, and Olive's inclinations induced her to side with him, for she suddenly recognised that Herbert Verney had become a potent factor in her life. She thought if her mother disliked Herbert Verney she ought to have said so openly, and not permitted them to have become intimately acquainted.

Olive had frequently ridden The Gem in his preparation for the Bathurst Show, and she was enthusiastically bent upon winning the prize for Herbert Verney and the horse for herself. And now, after all her trouble, her mother wished her to decline to ride The Gem or to see Herbert Verney again. Olive objected to throw over her engagement to ride, and hot words passed between mother and daughter.

Mrs. Thwaites did not allow her profound conviction that she was acting rightly to interfere with her judgment of Olive's conduct. She felt the girl must consider her request strange, and yet she dared not give any reason for it. She must submit to be

misunderstood until such time as she could with safety show she had acted for the best.

Olive had a will of her own, and felt she was as much in the right as her mother was in the wrong. She would not give way, and Mrs. Thwaites determined after the show to see Herbert Verney and find out what his intentions were towards Olive. It was quite evident to her mother that Olive was rapidly becoming attached to Herbert, but it was by no means certain, at present, that her feelings were reciprocated. The decision Mrs. Thwaites arrived at was unwise, but she was in a dilemma, and hardly knew how to act.

Herbert Verney arrived at The Fells a week before the show, and during that time saw much of Olive, who was constantly on the back of The Gem.

Fred Penistone, the groom, was loud in his praises of Miss Thwaites's handling of The Gem, and he considered the horse safe to win the prize.

'There's no doubt about it,' he said to Herbert. 'Mr. Raoul thinks he has a chance again with Shooter, but he won't be in it; and he's precious riled because Miss Thwaites won't ride his horse.'

'Like his impertinence!' thought Herbert. 'I wonder what right he has to imagine he possesses a claim on Olive's services.'

He had arrived at that point when he always thought of her as 'Olive'—a dangerous sign in the career of love.

There was much freedom of intercourse between Olive and Herbert Verney, and they were frequently alone together. No one appeared to consider this wrong or at all improper, and Philip Thwaites was delighted at the way matters were progressing. He had recovered from the shock of his conversation with Bob Insch, and now carried matters with a high hand with his wife. Mrs. Thwaites was, on the whole somewhat relieved at this conduct on the part of her husband, for it gave her some slight hope that he was not after all as guilty as she deemed him.

There was always much local excitement over the Bathurst Show, and on this occasion the interest extended beyond the usual sphere, on account of three or four horses from Sydney being entered. Several sporting wagers were made on the event, and Herbert Verney bet Raoul a hundred pounds that The Gem beat Shooter. The wager had been made during the heat of an argument as to the merits of the respective horses which had taken place at the Royal Hotel, the headquarters of the Show Committee.

Raoul was a free talker, and had a good opinion of his horse, and his remarks about The Gem, when Herbert Verney was not present, were disparaging.

Herbert Verney heard of this, and the next time he met Raoul he said he was perfectly certain The Gem was the better horse of the two, and offered to bet a hundred pounds he beat Shooter. Raoul was not slow to take up this challenge, for he knew

Shooter had improved considerably since the previous season.

‘I hear Miss Thwaites rides The Gem,’ said Raoul.

‘Yes,’ replied Herbert Verney; ‘she has kindly consented to do so. She rode Shooter for you last year, I believe?’

‘And won on him,’ said Raoul. ‘She has plenty of pluck—more of that commodity than judgment, I should say.’

He spoke of her as though she were a professional rider, and his tone annoyed Herbert Verney.

‘If all I hear be true,’ replied Herbert, ‘her judgment was only at fault in accepting the mount on your horse.’

‘I should think her judgment was all right there, when he won,’ retorted Raoul.

‘Shooter is hardly the kind of horse for a lady to ride; rather dangerous to handle,’ said Herbert.

‘Oh, he’s all right!’ carelessly replied Raoul; ‘a trifle headstrong and a bit of a puller, but no vice about him.’

‘Anyway, he’s not the sort of horse I should have asked Miss Thwaites to ride,’ said Herbert Verney.

Raoul shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say: ‘There was no occasion for her to ride him had she not wished to do so.’

‘I hope The Gem will prove an exemplary lady’s mount in every way,’ he added.

‘He will be a much safer mount than Shooter, you may rest assured of that,’ said Herbert.

‘You appear to take an uncommon interest in Miss Thwaites,’ answered Raoul.

It was a rude remark, and he was sorry immediately he uttered it, but when men are arguing and their tempers are quick, they occasionally make deplorable slips.

‘I imagine any gentleman would take an interest in the safety of a lady who is going to ride his horse,’ replied Herbert coldly, and keeping his temper admirably.

‘Well, she’s had enough practice, at any rate,’ said Raoul, ‘especially on The Gem. She ought to be well acquainted with him by this time.’

‘I presume Miss Thwaites rode Shooter before she won on him?’ said Herbert.

‘Oh dear no!’ said Raoul. ‘I casually met her on the ground, and knowing she was an accomplished horsewoman, asked her to ride him.’

‘And you allowed her to get up on a brute like that without knowing the sort of horse he was?’ said Herbert indignantly.

‘I don’t suppose he is any more of a brute than your horse,’ replied Raoul, ‘and she was ready enough to accept the mount.’

‘Probably; as a girl of spirit she would be. But you ought to have warned her what sort of a mount Shooter was,’ said Herbert.

When Herbert Verney left, Raoul and others made remarks to the effect that he seemed uncommonly touchy in that quarter.

'She's rather a smart girl,' said Raoul, 'but it is certainly not in her favour to have such a father as Philip Thwaites.'

Robert Insch happened to overhear this remark, and said sharply :

'I don't think you have much occasion to talk about fathers.'

There was a laugh against Raoul, as it was well known his father was sent out West after landing in Sydney with a batch of other men from a transport.

As Herbert Verney walked down the street he met Philip Thwaites, and stopped to speak to him. Since he had known Olive he had been more friendly with her father, but he did not like him, all the same.

'I hope you will win to-morrow,' said Thwaites. 'I know Olive is very anxious to do so. It was kind of you to give her such a good mount.'

'Not at all,' replied Herbert. 'I am much obliged to her for accepting it, and I hope after to-morrow The Gem will be her property.'

'It is a handsome present to make her,' said Thwaites.

'And one she will deserve if she wins,' replied Herbert.

'I am thinking of going to Sydney,' said Thwaites.

'There will be a chance for me there, and I do not see much here.'

'You had an excellent chance, but you let it slip,' thought Herbert, and added aloud: 'You will not find it an easy task to get on in Sydney. There is a good deal of overcrowding there, as in other large towns.'

'Mark Mellish managed to make a good bit there; I do not see why I should not do so,' he replied.

'Mark Mellish is an exceptional man,' said Herbert. 'He would have got on anywhere.'

'He did not have much luck here,' said Thwaites.

'Well, there is no harm in trying your fortune in Sydney,' said Herbert; 'and if there is anything I can do to help you, do not be afraid to ask.'

Philip Thwaites thanked him and went away, quite satisfied that he owed this good feeling on the part of Herbert Verney to Olive.

When Herbert arrived at The Fells, the groom met him with a long face, and it was evident something had happened of a not altogether pleasant nature. Herbert Verney, however, was so much occupied with his thoughts that he failed to notice Penistone's woebegone looks.

'Please, sir, there's something wrong with The Gem,' said the groom hesitatingly.

Herbert was all alert now. Something wrong with The Gem on the eve of the contest! This was a serious matter.

‘Wrong!’ he exclaimed. ‘What has happened?’

‘I hope it is nothing serious, sir, but he seems a bit off, and he don’t take his food readily.’

Herbert walked hastily round to the stables, and went into The Gem’s box. He examined the horse thoroughly, and noticed the listless look about him, and the dulness of his eyes.

‘Has he been coughing?’ he asked. ‘Is it a cold, or what is it?’

‘I can’t make it out. He seemed all right last night, but to-day he has been dull and tired-looking.’

‘It cannot be anything serious,’ said Herbert. ‘You had better remain with him until late, and if there is anything further send for me.’

‘Very well, sir.’

Herbert Verney always felt lonely at The Fells. Before his uncle’s death it had been a pleasure to him to visit there, but now the place did not seem the same.

He was hardly aware that a change had come over him since he met Olive Thwaites, but he began to realize it now, as he sat in the room in which his uncle was found dead. Strange as it may appear, Herbert Verney preferred this room to any other in the house. He seemed to have an idea that it was here he would find some clue as to the real cause of his uncle’s death. He was not, however, thinking of this now, but of Olive Thwaites.

When Raoul had spoken in a somewhat callous

way about the danger Olive incurred in riding Shooter, Herbert Verney had felt a keen desire to do something desperate, he hardly knew what, but something to relieve the sudden tension in his feelings. Why had Raoul's words provoked him so? Was it because he thought more of Olive Thwaites than he did of other women? He came to the conclusion this must be the cause, and he was not at all annoyed at tracing the symptoms in this direction.

The more he thought about Olive, the lonelier it appeared to be at The Fells, and he was quite relieved when he called to mind what Philip Thwaites had said about going to Sydney.

If Philip Thwaites took up his abode in Sydney, Olive would be there, and then there would be no occasion to visit The Fells frequently. He knew now it was not The Fells, or the estate connected with it, that drew him to Bathurst, but that Olive Thwaites was the magnet.

'I wonder if she is fond of me,' he thought. 'I think she is, but I would like to make sure of it. I'll ask her, any way; there will be no harm in that, and if I find she is not indifferent to me, I'll ask her to be my wife.'

He put the matter plainly now, and commenced to think what would be the result of such a question. He knew his mother would offer strong opposition to the match, but he also knew he could speedily bring her to his way of thinking.

Olive Thwaites was a charming girl, and it did not matter one iota to him that her father was a 'bit of a black sheep.'

'He's her father, and she cannot help that,' he said to himself. 'That responsibility rests with her mother, who might have done considerably better by accepting the early attentions of Mark Mellish. The Verneys are an old family, certainly. All the more reason why we should have some new blood in it.'

Herbert laughed softly to himself as he pictured the scene his uncle would have made when he found his nephew was bent upon marrying a daughter of 'that scamp Thwaites.' His uncle was not here to create a scene, and it mattered nothing to John Verney whether Herbert married, or whom he married.

'I'll go and see how The Gem is,' he said. 'Olive will be sadly disappointed if he is not at his best to-morrow, and so shall I, for I want to see her win.'

CHAPTER XVIII

OLIVE WINS THE GEM

MUCH to Herbert Verney's relief, The Gem appeared to be all right the following morning, and it was in a sanguine mood he went to the show-ground. As usual it was crowded, and numerous visitors had

arrived from various parts of the country and from Sydney.

These local country shows in Australia do an immense amount of good, and, as a rule, are well managed. They create rivalry between the farmers and squatters, and are the means of much friendly intercourse. They stimulate the breeders of stock, and improve the value of all farm produce.

Herbert Verney was well known by many people present, and his uncle's death had roused the curiosity of those who had not seen him since that painful event. When a young man comes into a fortune, it is surprising what a sudden interest he inspires in people who up to that time were ignorant of his existence. Fortune brings many smiles in her train; it is only when a man is down there is an inclination to kick him.

Herbert Verney was not one of the 'down' men. He looked quite contented with himself and his surroundings, and so he was.

Soon after he arrived on the ground he met Olive Thwaites, and thought how well she looked in her new habit.

She saw the admiration in his eyes, and was pleased to think he was satisfied with her appearance. Some girls look at their best in a riding-habit, and Olive was one of these. Experienced men saw at a glance she was an accomplished horsewoman from the fit of her habit and the way she walked.

Many admiring glances were cast in Olive's direction as she went round the ground with Herbert Verney. He was paying her marked attention, and envious members of her own sex would have been glad of the opportunity to change places with her. As this could not be done, they solaced themselves by saying unkind things about her, and expressing the opinion that 'she had better be careful what she was doing.' Envy is a deadly enemy to peace of mind, and so some of these girls found out before the day was over.

There were several contests in the Ring before the competition for the Cup commenced, and Herbert Verney had the satisfaction of seeing one of his horses take a prize.

'That is a good augury for your success,' he said to Olive. 'I am sure The Gem will win now.'

'I feel in excellent spirits,' she replied, 'and confident of success.'

There were a dozen horses competing for the Cup, and several of them were noted jumpers, and had secured prizes at the Metropolitan and other big shows. It was an open class both for horses and riders, and ladies were allowed to compete. As there were two other lady riders besides Olive, the committee decided to give a gold-mounted riding-whip to the best lady rider.

'And you will be certain to secure that, whether The Gem is successful or otherwise,' said Herbert, when he heard of it.

‘Have you such a very good opinion of my riding?’ she asked.

‘You are the best rider out West, and I do not think anyone will contradict it,’ he replied.

She was proud of his praise, and felt very happy—happier than she had ever been before. His manner to her was different; she knew he was more affectionate than usual.

Herbert Verney attended to the saddling of The Gem.

‘I do not mean you to run any risk if I can help it,’ he said, as Olive stood by watching him, her face glowing with excitement and happiness; and the group of people round The Gem looked at her admiringly.

‘Fine girl, that! Who is she?’ asked Leo St. Rollox, who also had a horse entered for the Cup.

‘That’s our local beauty,’ said the friend with whom he was staying, ‘and she rides uncommonly well. Verney was lucky to secure her services for The Gem. She’ll win on him if it is possible.’

‘That’s Verney’s horse, is it?’ said St. Rollox, ‘and it is Verney saddling it himself? He doesn’t mean to throw a chance away. As likely as not he’ll fall in love with that charming girl if she wins the prize for him.’

‘Some people say he has fallen in love with her already,’ replied his companion.

‘Then I admire his taste.’

He went across and shook hands with Herbert Verney, who introduced him to Olive.

'You will have a good mount, Miss Thwaites,' he said, 'and I am sure you will do justice to both horse and owner.'

'I shall do my best,' replied Olive, with quiet confidence.

'And with that I am sure Mr. Verney will be satisfied,' he replied.

'I shall be satisfied under any circumstances,' said Herbert, 'provided Olive has a safe ride.'

He did not seem to notice that he had called her Olive, but she did, and St. Rollox, glancing at her, saw her colour rise and her eyes glisten.

'It's a case, I'll bet,' he said to himself. 'Gad! she is a pretty girl.'

The horses were going into the Ring, and Herbert assisted Olive into the saddle.

He put his hand on the horse's withers, and looked up into her face, and Olive read something there that had been missing before.

'Take no risks,' he said earnestly. 'I would rather lose a hundred cups than allow you to come to any harm.'

'I will be very careful,' she said with a happy smile, 'but I mean to win.'

There was confidence in her tone, and she seemed a different girl now that she was in the saddle.

‘Yes, win,’ he said, ‘and then, Olive, I must have a few words with you.’

‘Don’t scold me, whatever you do,’ she said.

‘No, I think I may safely promise that,’ he replied.

She rode The Gem into the Ring, and was greeted with a hearty round of applause. Philip Thwaites might not be popular, but it was evident this did not apply to his daughter.

The cheers were exhilarating, and Olive cantered The Gem round the Ring in high spirits. The horse moved well, and Olive sat him with an elegance and grace and held him with a firmness that denoted the accomplished horsewoman.

‘By Jove! that girl can ride,’ said St. Rollox enthusiastically. ‘I shan’t mind being beaten by her.’

‘She’s one of the few that can ride,’ said a man standing near him. ‘If you’d seen her ride that big hulking beggar over there last year, you’d have thought her a wonder;’ and he pointed to Shooter, who was restless, and giving Raoul a lot of trouble.

‘Did she ride that horse?’ said St. Rollox in surprise.

‘Yes, and won on him—that’s more than his owner will do this time.’

Mark Mellish reached the show-ground late, the special train in which he had travelled from Sydney having been delayed. The horses were in the Ring

when he arrived, and he looked round to see if he could catch a glimpse of Herbert Verney. He saw Olive Thwaites on The Gem, and as she pulled up to speak to someone near the rails, he perceived it was Herbert Verney. Mark struggled round the Ring, and eventually reached his side.

‘I thought you had given up the idea of coming,’ said Herbert.

‘The confounded train got stuck up at Katoomba,’ said Mark, ‘or I should have been here long ago.’

‘Trains have a nasty habit of being delayed when a man is in a hurry,’ replied Herbert.

‘Are you going to win?’ said Mark.

‘I hope so. I have the best rider of the lot up.’

‘Olive Thwaites?’ said Mark. ‘There’s no doubt about that. How well she looks on a horse!’

Olive rode past and nodded smilingly towards them.

‘There are not many girls like Olive,’ said Herbert Verney enthusiastically.

Mark looked at him and smiled as he thought: ‘I fancied there must be some attraction at Bathurst.’

All the horses cleared the hurdles the first time, but four of them bungled at the water jump. It was a formidable leap, and Raoul let Shooter have his head as he rushed at it. The horse got safely over, but his rider had some difficulty in preventing him bolting.

‘He can’t hold him, but Miss Thwaites held him

right enough last year,' said the man standing near St. Rollox who had spoken before.

'She must be wonderfully strong to hold a horse like that,' said St. Rollox.

'It's the knack she has of doing it,' was the reply.

Olive followed Shooter, and The Gem pricked his ears and opened his eyes wide as he looked at the fence in front of him. For a few moments he hesitated, and Olive sat still, stroking his neck and soothing him. She did not mean him to delay very long, and quickly set him going at the jump.

Herbert Verney felt his heart beat fast as he saw The Gem rush at the fence. He consoled himself by thinking it was not more formidable than the one Olive had successfully taken him over at The Fells.

The Gem rose at the leap and flew the water in grand style, landing several feet to the good on the opposite side.

'By Jove! he can jump,' said Mark. 'And doesn't she sit him well!'

'I shall be glad when it is over,' replied Herbert.

'There's no danger in riding a horse like that,' replied Mark. 'I'll warrant Olive is enjoying it.'

It was to be a long contest, that was evident, for eight horses were left in after the second round.

Shooter and The Gem were the favourites with the crowd, the latter for choice, because Olive rode him.

Raoul felt confident of success, for Shooter was fencing splendidly and calming down.

Olive watched him carefully, and fancied he did not seem so full of life as when she rode him the year before.

The Gem, she knew, was doing his best and enjoying the fun quite as much as his rider.

Herbert Verney had not told her about the horse being a shade off colour the previous night, as he thought it might cause her to lose confidence.

At the third attempt Shooter bungled at the water jump, striking the fence heavily, and landing with his hind legs in the water. In making his recovery he threw Raoul on to his neck, but he quickly regained his position in the saddle.

Raoul had not the best of tempers, and Shooter's failure to clear the jump caused him to handle the horse roughly. This was a mistake Olive would not have made.

Again The Gem went at the leap, and there was breathless expectation as to the result. If The Gem got well over, it would give him a slight advantage over his formidable opponent.

Olive was as cool and self-possessed as possible, and let The Gem go his own pace. As the horse neared the jump he increased his speed, and with a snort of half-savage delight and triumph in his strength, he went over it at a bound. It was the best leap so far by a long way and the crowd cheered heartily.

Olive felt proud as she rode back to the starting-point, where the judges were standing, and reined up

The Gem alongside Shooter and three others still left in. Shooter was restless, and Olive said :

‘Keep him as far away as you can, please, Mr. Raoul.’

Raoul scowled and pulled his mount back. Shooter resented this rough treatment and lashed out savagely. Both horse and rider were evidently out of temper with each other.

Olive noticed this, and wishing to do Raoul a good turn, said :

‘Do not pull him about. He’ll be quiet if you handle him carefully.’

Raoul did not reply, but Olive’s kindly-meant remark irritated him.

The judges were now examining the horses, and the riders had dismounted. They were careful over their inspection and singled out The Gem, Shooter, and St. Rollox’s horse, Stargazer, for the final trial over the fences.

Shooter jumped much better this time, but both Stargazer and The Gem were not so successful.

Raoul was sanguine of winning now, and at the next attempt indulged in over-confidence and a display that ruined his horse’s chance. Shooter took off badly, struck the fence, landed in the water, and shot Raoul over his head on to the ground.

Full of wrath, Raoul scrambled to his feet, seized Shooter by the bridle as he came out, and tried to remount. The horse, however, broke away from him,

and just as Olive set The Gem going he suddenly swerved round and galloped straight across her track.

It was a narrow escape for Olive and The Gem, and Herbert Verney clutched Mark's arm in his anxiety for her safety.

'That was a narrow squeak,' said Mark. 'By Jove! she's going straight at the jump. She has plenty of courage.'

As Shooter crossed in front of The Gem, Olive just managed to ease her mount sufficiently to miss Raoul's horse, but no sooner was the course clear again than she set The Gem going.

It was a plucky thing to do, under the circumstances, and the result was awaited with anxiety.

The Gem did not fail again. He seemed ashamed of his previous bungle and determined there should be no mistake about it this time.

Olive felt him prepare for the leap, and then with a bound he cleared fence and water in magnificent style, landing well on the farther side. Olive sat him like a perfect model, and her determination and skill roused the enthusiasm of the crowd to the highest pitch.

When the blue ribbon was handed to her, and it was seen The Gem had secured first prize, the cheering broke out again and again. The judges shook hands with Olive and complimented her upon her splendid riding.

As Olive rode The Gem round the Ring she halted

close to where Herbert Verney and Mark Mellish were standing.

Herbert stooped down, and passing under the rails, went and shook her heartily by the hand, a proceeding that afforded the crowd intense satisfaction.

‘You have won The Gem,’ said Herbert, and then added, slowly and earnestly, ‘and I am going to ask you to give me something in return, Olive.’

‘What is it?’ she replied in a low voice. ‘What have I to give you in exchange for such a present as The Gem?’

‘Yourself!’ he replied, and as he looked into her face he fancied his request would be granted.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNPLEASANT TASK

THE GEM triumphed, and Olive was tasting the sweets of victory, for the judges also awarded her the gold-mounted whip, and she richly deserved it.

A greater happiness, however, was in store for her when Herbert Verney asked her to be his wife, and she consented. His proposal was not unexpected, but it was made sooner than she anticipated. She had decided how to answer him when he put the momentous question. It was the great crisis of her

life, the turning-point upon which so much depended, but she did not fear the result.

The Gem was taken back to The Fells, Herbert saying :

‘ It does not matter now, Olive, where he is stabled, for all I have you will share with me.’

‘ That is a far greater gift than The Gem,’ she said, ‘ and I am very happy.’

She thought of her mother’s sudden and strange antipathy to Herbert Verney, but she did not mention it to him. On her return home she at once told her mother Herbert Verney had asked her to be his wife, and that she had consented.

Mrs. Thwaites was so agitated and alarmed at the unexpected news that she was powerless to protest, but when her feelings calmed down she made up her mind to see Herbert Verney, and endeavour to induce him to release Olive from her promise.

Olive saw her mother was much displeased, but she did not think she would go so far as to interfere now that matters had reached a climax.

Mrs. Thwaites was a determined woman, and knowing what she did, felt this match must be put a stop to at all cost. It was a difficult matter for her to go to The Fells, to see Herbert Verney, and to keep it a secret. She set out on her errand early next morning, and Olive had no idea where she had gone.

Philip Thwaites was jubilant at the news of his daughter’s engagement. He considered it a rare

stroke of luck for himself in more senses than one. Herbert Verney, as his son-in-law, would be sure to render him valuable assistance when called upon to do so. He did not compare his own position and the relationship he stood in to Robert Insch, or he might have found ample cause for reflection as to the reliability of placing trust in a son-in-law. Certainly he had not rendered Robert Insch any valuable assistance since he had married his daughter ; on the contrary, he had been a thorn in his side, and a hindrance to his success.

Philip Thwaites was all for self, and what concerned other people mattered little to him. Olive had done well. He even took credit to himself for the engagement, deluding himself with the idea that in some unaccountable way he had brought it about. He derived the greatest satisfaction from the thought that even if Herbert Verney ever heard of his visit to The Fells on the night of the murder, he would be disposed to accept any explanation he might offer. Had he known that at the time he was indulging in these pleasant reflections his wife was on her way to see Herbert Verney, a change would have come over him with marvellous rapidity.

Mrs. Thwaites made the best of her way to The Fells. Anxiety to catch Herbert Verney alone, before he left home, urged her on. She had not made up her mind what to say. It was not in her thoughts to betray her husband, but imagining as

she did, and with good grounds for so doing, that he knew more about John Verney's death than he cared to tell, she regarded with feelings akin to horror any marriage between Olive and Herbert Verney. She looked ahead, and pictured what might happen in the future if Herbert Verney made a discovery. He would probably think he had been tricked, and might even go so far as to imagine Olive had deceived him. It was such reflections as these urged Mrs. Thwaites to act in the manner she had decided upon.

She found Herbert Verney at home, and he gave her a hearty welcome, thinking she had come to see him about his engagement. He hastened at once to tender an explanation.

'It happened so suddenly,' he said, 'I had no time to consult you, but I felt confident of your approval. Olive will be very happy. I shall make it my one special care in life to minister to her comfort. I am sure you will forgive me for being so precipitate, and if there is any blame attaching to any one it is to myself. Olive and I have seen much of each other during the past few months, and we have found out we cannot do without each other.'

Herbert Verney's words made Mrs. Thwaites's unpleasant task still more disagreeable to her. For a few moments she hesitated and thought :

'Why should I interfere? Why should I crush Olive's happiness?'

Then came the thought :

‘He may discover all, and what then?’

This nerved her to her task, and she said firmly :

‘Something has happened, Mr. Verney, which has induced me to take what you will no doubt consider a strange step. I ask you at the outset to believe me when I say that under ordinary circumstances nothing would have given me greater happiness than to see Olive your wife. When I tell you it is impossible for Olive to marry you, I want you to believe I am speaking the truth, and that nothing has ever caused me greater pain than the step I am now compelled to take.’

He looked at her in amazement. Her reply was so utterly unexpected, so different from what he had hoped for.

‘Do you mean you refuse to allow Olive to accept my offer?’ he said. ‘If so, you are too late; she has accepted it, and I shall not release her from her promise, unless she requests me to do so.’

‘You must release her, Mr. Verney,’ said Mrs. Thwaites. ‘I ask it for both your sakes. You can never marry Olive. Oh, it is too horrible to think of!’ and she shuddered, and looked so terrified that he was really alarmed, and fancied her mind must be unhinged.

‘You make use of strange language,’ he said. ‘Sit down, Mrs. Thwaites, and calm yourself. You seem faint and ill. Let me get you a little brandy.’

She had declined to sit down before, but now she

sank into a chair exhausted. He poured out some brandy, and she sipped a little. The spirit revived her, and she said :

‘Do you imagine it is my wish to come here and say such words to you? I tell you it breaks my heart to act as I am compelled to do, but no other course is open to me.’

‘Has your husband sent you here?’ he asked.

‘No.’

‘Not Olive?’ he said in a startled voice, and then added with a laugh : ‘No, that is too absurd.’

‘I am here of my own free will,’ she replied, ‘and neither my husband nor Olive knows of my visit.’

He could not understand the situation ; there was evidently some mystery difficult of explanation.

‘Surely you will give me your reasons for making this strange request,’ he said.

‘I cannot. I can only plead with you, and ask you to do as I wish.’

‘You cannot expect me to give up Olive merely at your request. I ask you to give me your reasons, but I know of no argument you could advance to make me do as you wish.’

She admired the way he spoke, and again her decision wavered. She saw, however, no loophole of escape.

‘Mr. Verney,’ she said, looking at him with terrified eyes, ‘I *dare not* give you my reasons.’

He was startled now. Dare not! What could she mean?

‘There must be some grave mistake,’ he said. ‘Why will you not trust me, and tell me plainly what you mean? I am sure I could dispel your anxiety. I have no doubt you think you are acting for the best.’

‘I am certain of it,’ she said.

‘Then confide in me,’ he answered.

‘I dare not,’ she replied.

‘Do you mistrust me?’

‘Oh no, it is not that; but if I told you my reasons you would do your duty, no matter what the result might be,’ she said.

He was plunging deeper and deeper into darkness; he had no idea of her meaning. She must be labouring under some strange delusion.

‘I will give you my promise not to say one word of what you tell me, nor to take any action, no matter what the nature of your communication may be,’ he said earnestly.

Dare she tell him all she feared? It would speedily put an end to the engagement if she did; but then Herbert Verney might think himself absolved from a promise made under such circumstances, and she thought of her husband. He had not been a good husband, but she could not betray him. She shook her head sadly, and said:

‘It would not be fair to accept your promise, for you would feel bound to break it.’

There was a knock at the door, and Oatlands said :

‘Mr. Mellish has called, sir, and wishes to see you before he leaves for Sydney.’

At the mention of Mark Mellish’s name Mrs. Thwaites started, and turned pale.

‘Ask Mr. Mellish to wait. I will be with him in a few moments,’ said Herbert.

Mrs. Thwaites was thinking of Mark Mellish’s words, ‘Do not be afraid to ask anything of me—I shall be only too pleased to help you;’ and her reply: ‘No, there is nothing now, but I may have need of your assistance at some future time.’

Had that time arrived? She was sorely in need of assistance and advice now. Would it be safe to trust Mark Mellish with her secret? Would it be fair to burden him with it? These were the questions she rapidly asked herself.

‘You know Mark Mellish?’ said Herbert.

‘Very well. He is one of my best friends—the best,’ she replied, and then said: ‘Mr. Verney, I am about to make a strange request. You will fail to understand why I do so, but it is the only way to convince you that an engagement between yourself and Olive is impossible.’

He smiled as he replied: ‘I shall never be convinced of that; but what is your request?’

‘You have great confidence in Mark Mellish—in his integrity and judgment?’ she said.

‘I have. I know no man I would sooner trust.’

‘Then let me tell my reasons to him,’ she said.

‘You would rather trust him than me?’ said Herbert, offended.

‘No, I do not prefer to trust him, but I think it fairer to you I should do so,’ she replied.

‘It is a strange way of showing your confidence in me,’ he replied.

‘You will not think so in the end,’ she answered.

‘But why do you wish to tell your reasons for this strange conduct—I can call it by no other name—to Mark Mellish?’

‘Because I want advice.’

‘I will give it you.’

‘I dare not ask you.’

‘Why?’

‘I cannot tell you.’

He gave a gesture of impatience. She was Olive’s mother, and deserved every consideration, but this was exasperating.

‘I do not wonder at your annoyance,’ she said. ‘My conduct must appear very strange to you.’

‘It is more than strange. I think you are labouring under some delusion.’

‘I wish such were the case, but unfortunately, there is no room for doubt,’ she said.

He saw no way out of the difficulty, and it could do no harm to humour her, and it might do good if Mark Mellish proved willing to accept the strange situation in which she desired to place him.

‘ Shall I ask Mr. Mellish to come in, and then you can put your question to him ?’

After a brief hesitation she said :

‘ Will you abide by his decision after he has heard my story ?’

‘ What is the decision he will be called upon to give ?’

‘ Whether after hearing my story he considers it absolutely necessary your engagement with Olive should be broken off—that it is impossible for such a marriage to take place,’ she replied.

‘ I will not promise ; but if he gave a decision of that description, it would have considerable weight with me,’ he answered. ‘ Are you willing to abide by his decision ?’

‘ Yes,’ she replied, for she felt certain he could only give such an one as she desired.

‘ It is not fair to ask me to give up Olive, and I will not, but you may ask Mark’s opinion if you wish. I can go no farther than that.’

She knew he had finally made up his mind, but she felt if she convinced Mark Mellish, it would go a long way towards influencing Herbert Verney.

‘ Then perhaps you had better call Mr. Mellish in,’ she said.

Mark Mellish started in surprise when he saw who was with Herbert Verney, but he quickly said : ‘ This is an unexpected pleasure,’ and shook hands with her.

Herbert Verney thought it only kind to Mrs. Thwaites that he should explain how matters stood between them. This he did lucidly and clearly, and Mark Mellish was much astonished.

‘It is a grave responsibility you wish to place upon me,’ he said to Mrs. Thwaites.

‘But you will not shrink from it?’ she said. ‘I am in great trouble.’

‘The happiness of two people is at stake,’ said Mark. ‘I know of no graver responsibility than to be called upon to decide such a question as that. It may mean the saddening of two bright lives.’

He spoke feelingly. His own life had been saddened by the woman who now asked such a grave responsibility from him. Mrs. Thwaites knew what he meant, and how he felt, and pitied him. Her trouble, however, was greater than she could bear alone, and she said :

‘There is no other way. Will you help me?’

‘Yes,’ said Mark quietly.

Herbert Verney went out of the room, and left them together.

It was a strange situation, and Mark Mellish felt it keenly. All his love of years gone by for this woman seemed to rush back upon him with overwhelming force. He felt a fierce desire to clasp her in his arms, but he restrained himself, and said, with a touch of sadness and regret in his voice :

‘You seem fated to bring shadows into my life.’

‘I am very sorry, Mark, but when you have heard my story you will say I acted for the best,’ she replied.

CHAPTER XX

MARK GIVES GOOD ADVICE

SLOWLY Mrs. Thwaites told her story to Mark Mellish, and he listened in amazement. He was astounded at the revelations she made, and wondered what had induced Philip Thwaites to conceal the fact that he was at The Fells on the night of the murder of John Verney.

Mrs. Thwaites did not mince matters ; she wished Mark to fully understand what she felt and dreaded. She related the conversation she overheard between her husband and her father, and also what Philip Thwaites had said to her when she questioned him.

‘Can you wonder, Mark,’ she said, ‘that I think it too terrible for Olive and Mr. Verney to marry? Imagine what Herbert Verney would feel when he found out what manner of man Olive’s father was, and what he had done.’

She was much agitated, and Mark knew she saw things in their worst light.

During her story he had been carefully thinking the matter out, and weighing the facts for and against Philip Thwaites. There was no actual evidence that

Philip Thwaites had any hand in John Verney's death. To Mark it seemed probable that Philip's story was correct—that he had gone to The Fells on business, and had been afraid to come forward at the inquest lest suspicion might fall upon him. The fact that the course Philip Thwaites took was calculated to throw grave suspicion upon him if it was discovered he was at The Fells on the night of the murder rather influenced Mark in his favour. The bookmaker was a shrewd man, and an excellent judge of character, as most men following his calling are, and he did not think Philip Thwaites was wicked enough or bold enough to commit such a deed. The more he thought over the story Mrs. Thwaites related, the firmer became his conviction that in this instance Philip Thwaites had spoken the truth. It was a probable story he had told, and having let the inquest go by without coming forward to give evidence, he had found himself in a worse position than he had imagined would be the case.

It was some time before he replied to Mrs. Thwaites, and she said :

‘Surely there is no cause for hesitation? I wish there were.’

‘You will abide by my decision?’ said Mark. ‘You promised to do so.’

‘Yes,’ she answered, with a fear at her heart that he would decide against her.

‘Your story has caused me both pain and surprise,’

he commenced. 'It is a strange story, very strange, and you heard it in a remarkable manner. I do not wonder at your desire to break off the engagement between Olive and Mr. Verney. It would, as you say, be a horrible thing for Herbert Verney to marry Olive if your suspicions of your husband were correct.'

'Do you doubt them? Have I any room for hope? can you convince me of that?' she asked breathlessly.

'I think you have good grounds for hope, and I also think I can convince you that your husband has spoken the truth,' said Mark.

Mrs. Thwaites clasped her hands, and said in an agitated voice :

'If you can convince me, you will be the best friend a suffering woman ever had.'

Mark Mellish then set himself the task of pleading the cause of Philip Thwaites to his wife. He used every argument he could think of to convince her her husband had no hand in the death of John Verney.

'I am certain of it,' he said; 'I believe his story. He has acted foolishly, almost criminally, and placed himself in a position of peril, but that he was instrumental in causing John Verney's death I refuse to believe. His whole life is against such a supposition. He is not a man endowed with much courage, if you will pardon me for saying so, and it is because of his lack of courage he has placed himself in this position. Had he come forward at the inquest, all would have been well, and no suspicion would have attached to

him. I think you have taken a morbid view of the facts.'

Mrs. Thwaites was much relieved to hear Mark Mellish talk in this strain. She wished to think as he thought, and to believe her husband had been guilty of folly, not crime.

'But supposing your argument turns out to be wrong,' she said. 'Can you imagine a more terrible position than Olive and Mr. Verney would be placed in if such were the case?'

'It would indeed be a terrible position,' he replied, 'and that is why you can see I have such firm faith in your husband's innocence. Mrs. Thwaites—Ada—' he said earnestly, 'I will do all in my power to prove to you he is innocent by trying to discover the guilty man.'

'No, no, no!' she said fearfully, 'you must not do that.'

He smiled and said :

'I see you have not as much faith in your husband as I have.'

She felt somewhat ashamed and said :

'You must act as you think best. I will trust you in everything. What do you advise now?'

'Give me permission to tell Herbert Verney that I think after hearing your story there is no just cause why his engagement with Olive should be broken off.'

Mrs. Thwaites hesitated. She was sorely tempted,

and had promised to abide by Mark Mellish's decision, but she had not expected this.

He saw her hesitation and said :

'I will take full responsibility for the advice I am giving you. I am certain I am right. Supposing, however, the worst happened, I undertake to relieve you of all responsibility with Herbert Verney.'

'You are taking a great risk,' she said.

'I do not think so, but I would undertake any risk to secure your happiness, for old times' sake,' he replied.

'You have not forgotten those days ?' she asked.

'No, and I never shall. May I speak to Herbert Verney ?'

'Yes.'

'You have done well,' he answered. 'It would have been a thousand pities, a grave mistake, to separate them on such flimsy evidence as you possess.'

'Flimsy !' she exclaimed.

'Yes. You have really no grounds for thinking your husband guilty of a crime. He has acted wrongly, but that is all.'

'You will tell Herbert Verney I had good grounds for acting as I have done ?' she said.

'Yes, I will explain fully to him,' said Mark.

When Herbert Verney entered the room again he saw a change in Mrs. Thwaites—she looked more cheerful—and he said :

‘I see Mark has convinced you.’

‘He has,’ replied Mrs. Thwaites, ‘but he will tell you I thought I was doing my duty to both yourself and Olive.’

‘I never doubted that,’ he replied.

‘I have heard Mrs. Thwaites’ story,’ said Mark, ‘and it surprised me greatly. Believing what she did, I have no hesitation in saying she acted in a manner worthy of the highest praise. It must have given her great pain to try and part you from Olive. Happily, I have convinced her there is no necessity for that.’

‘I knew she must be labouring under some mistake,’ said Herbert.

‘A very painful misapprehension,’ said Mark ; ‘but that has been removed, and I heartily congratulate you on your engagement. Olive is a girl in a thousand.’

‘Thank you, Mark,’ replied Herbert. ‘I appreciate your congratulations.’

Mrs. Thwaites rose to go, and Herbert said :

‘May I drive you home?’

‘No, thank you. I do not wish either my husband or Olive to know I have been here,’ she replied.

‘This has been a morning of surprises,’ said Herbert when she was gone, ‘and I am afraid you have missed your train.’

‘Missing a train is a small matter in a case of this kind,’ said Mark.

‘Whatever possessed her to act in such an extraordinary manner?’

‘That I cannot tell,’ said Mark ; ‘but I can safely say her story staggered me at first, and I began to think she was right after all, and there could be no marriage with Olive.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Herbert.

‘There was no nonsense about it,’ replied Mark.
‘Her story was far removed from nonsense.’

‘I shall probably hear all about it some day,’ said Herbert.

‘You may, and you may not. If you do hear it, you will not be at all surprised at Mrs. Thwaites’ conduct. You will commend her for all she has done,’ replied Mark.

Between two men of such sporting proclivities the conversation quickly changed and turned upon horses and racing prospects.

After a few general remarks about the show, the performance of The Gem, and Olive’s splendid riding, Mark Mellish said :

‘Sam is quite enthusiastic about our chance of pulling off the double. He has tried Plutarch, Talisman, and Trickster over six furlongs, and your horse did all he asked him. It was not, however, a gallop got up for the benefit of the touts, and I fancy Talisman’s form did not make a favourable impression. St. Rollox saw the gallop,’ added Mark with a smile.

‘Did he?’ said Herbert. ‘What did he think of it?’

‘I never asked him, but from his face Sam imagines he was quite satisfied he had nothing to fear from Talisman.’

‘Then he’ll find out his mistake when the race is run,’ said Herbert. ‘How does Glen Innes go? Have you had a “rough up” with him?’

‘Yes, he’s been through the mill, and Sam is satisfied, but he thinks Talisman for the Handicap better than Glen Innes for the Cup.’

‘How about backing them?’ asked Herbert.

‘I think you had better stand in with my book; that will give us a big win if the double comes off, and if Talisman gets home in the Newmarket, the double book will be all profit.’

‘You mean, make a book for the pair?’

‘Exactly, and I think it will be a good thing.’

‘I’m quite agreeable,’ said Herbert. ‘What is the size of the book?’

‘Ten thousand straight out on each race, and twenty thousand on the double,’ said Mark, ‘and we can work it to a profit anyway.’

‘That I must leave to you,’ said Herbert. ‘I know nothing at all about bookmaking.’

‘It is a much better game than backing them,’ said Mark, smiling.

‘Probably,’ replied Herbert, ‘and yet there are some men who appear to make decent livings at backing horses’

‘It is a precarious means of existence,’ said Mark.
‘I should not care to try it.’

‘I shall back Talisman as well,’ said Herbert.

‘Please yourself about that,’ replied Mark.

‘If you will wait until to-morrow, I will return to Sydney with you,’ said Herbert, and to this Mark agreed.

Herbert Verney called to see Olive in the afternoon and remained with her some considerable time.

Mark Mellish paid Bob Insch a visit and was pleased to note signs of a revival in trade at the work-shops.

‘The demand for buggies is on the increase, I see,’ said Mark.

‘Your order gave me a lift up,’ said Bob, ‘and now I have more in from Mr. Verney and some of my old customers. I have quite as much on hand as I can manage. Anything good for the Newmarket and Australian Cup? You generally know of something worth backing.’

‘I am afraid you talk too much, Bob, for me to feel safe in giving you a tip. However, if you will promise to remain dumb on this subject I will tell you a good double.’

‘I’ll be as dumb as though I had never been born,’ said Bob.

‘I expect you were not very dumb when you were born,’ laughed Mark, ‘judging from what I have known of you since that interesting event.’

‘What’s the tip?’ said Bob.

‘Have a trifle on Talisman and Glen Innes.’

‘Both in your stable. Talisman is owned by Mr. Verney, is he not?’

‘Yes, and you ought to have a bit on Mr. Verney’s horse, because he’ll be one of the family presently,’ laughed Mark.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Bob.

‘I suppose you have not heard the news yet,’ said Mark. ‘It was a bit sudden, I confess, but there’s nothing like getting these affairs settled at once.’

‘Mark, you are talking rot!’ said Bob.

‘Never was more sensible in my life,’ answered Mark.

‘Then tell me what you are driving at,’ said Bob as he took up a hammer and prepared to start work again.

‘Olive is engaged to be married to Herbert Verney,’ said Mark.

The hammer dropped from Bob Insch’s hand, and fell with a crash on to some paint-cans. He turned quickly round, and catching Mark by the arm said hoarsely:

‘You’re joking. You must be joking, Mark.’

‘It is quite correct. There is no joke about it.’

‘My God!’ exclaimed Bob Insch as he sat down half dazed upon a bench.

Then it suddenly dawned upon Mark that Bob Insch knew of Philip Thwaites’ doings at The Fells.

What an ass he was not to think of it before! Mrs. Thwaites had told him of the conversation she had heard between her father and her husband.

He went up to Bob Insch and said :

‘Cheer up, Bob. It’s not half as bad as you think.’

Bob Insch looked at him and said :

‘What do you know?’

‘Everything,’ said Mark.

‘Who told you?’

‘Your daughter.’

‘She knows?’ said Bob excitedly.

‘Yes.’

‘And she let Olive become engaged to Herbert Verney! It’s a sin and a shame, and I’ll stop it, if Philip Thwaites swings for it,’ said Bob.

‘You will do no such thing,’ said Mark. ‘Sit still and listen to me.’

He then told Bob Insch all that had taken place at The Fells.

‘And you think Philip has told the truth?’ asked Bob.

‘I do.’

‘Mark, you’re one of the best. You have lifted a heavy weight off my shoulders,’ said Bob. ‘I hope to God his innocence will be proved.’

‘It shall be proved,’ said Mark, ‘for her sake.’

CHAPTER XXI

OLIVE'S RING

PHILIP THWAITES removed to Sydney, as he had decided to do, and his wife and Olive accompanied him.

Mrs. Thwaites was quite reconciled to leaving Bathurst now, although she had declared some time previously that if her husband went to Sydney he would go alone. Olive was blissfully ignorant of all that had taken place at The Fells, and was delighted at the prospect of being near Herbert Verney.

It was not long before Philip Thwaites, mainly through the influence of Mark Mellish, obtained a certain footing in the Ring. Although he had been introduced by Mark Mellish, he was not popular, and was, in fact, merely tolerated on account of the man who had stood sponsor to him.

Mark Mellish had even gone so far as to guarantee Philip Thwaites, which meant that his losses, if any, would be promptly met. It requires a good deal of pluck and confidence in a man to guarantee him in the Ring. Mark Mellish certainly had the pluck, any amount of it, but his confidence in Philip Thwaites was strictly limited. When it came to handling money, he knew Thwaites was not a man to be implicitly trusted; and yet he had guaranteed him. He knew why he had done so. There was

only one reason—to help Mrs. Thwaites and Olive. Mark had spoken truly at The Fells when he said he had not forgotten the old love, nor should he ever do so. He was not a man to easily forget or readily forgive, but he had long since forgiven Ada Thwaites, although he had not forgotten her. It was the memory of those bygone days that caused him to assist Philip Thwaites.

Perhaps the person most surprised at what Mark had done was Philip Thwaites himself, but he soon came to regard it as a matter of course, and said to himself:

‘We are old townies; why should he not help me? I would have done as much for him,’ which latter part of his soliloquy he could not even bring himself to believe.

Mark Mellish soon discovered that Philip Thwaites was inclined to be rash, and that the gambling spirit had fairly seized hold of him. It was not in the bookmaking line he gambled. Philip Thwaites had shown an aptitude for making a book which rather surprised Mark Mellish: he had not thought him quite so level-headed.

Had he stuck to his bookmaking, all would have been well; but he did not, and the attractions of billiards, cards, and hazard proved too much for him. He was out late nearly every night, and when he came home it was generally approaching daylight.

Mrs. Thwaites thought nothing of this; she knew

how it would be when they came to Sydney. If Philip Thwaites stayed out late in Bathurst, there was ten times more inducement for him to do so in Sydney.

Olive, however, was troubled because she thought Herbert Verney would hardly approve of her father's conduct. She mentioned the matter to her mother, who said :

‘You need have no apprehension on that score. Mr. Verney knew too much about your father before he proposed to you for his conduct to make any difference to him.’

Mark Mellish remonstrated with Philip Thwaites, who resented his interference, and said :

‘Because you have assisted me to gain a position in the Ring, and guaranteed me, that is no reason why you should endeavour to control my actions apart from the bookmaking. In that you have a right to know how I stand, and all I do, and I think you will acknowledge I have not done amiss for a novice.’

‘You have done much better than I did when I first started,’ replied Mark, ‘and I have no desire whatever to control your actions. I am merely giving you a friendly hint that the money you are in a fair way of making in the Ring you stand a good chance of fooling away at cards and dice.’

‘Don’t alarm yourself,’ said Philip Thwaites. ‘I am quite as well able to take care of myself at

the card-table or at hazard as I am on the race-course.'

'Then you are one out of many who cannot do so,' replied Mark. 'It is not so much that, as the class of men you become intimate with. A prominent bookmaker has a reputation to maintain just the same as a man occupying a high position in any other line of business. A man in the Ring is judged by the men he associates with, and he cannot afford to ignore public opinion.'

'And do not scores of men in the Ring play cards and dice?' asked Philip.

'Granted they do, that is no reason you should,' said Mark.

'Have you any objection to any particular acquaintance of mine?' asked Philip Thwaites, with a faintly perceptible sneer.

'One in particular,' was Mark's unexpected reply.

'Who is he?'

'A man called Devereux. He's a shark, and a dangerous fellow.'

'Do you know him?'

'He would like to know me,' replied Mark.

'But you declined the acquaintanceship?'

'I did.'

'For what reason?'

Mark Mellish told him what had taken place at Randwick, when Charles Devereux tried to 'ring the changes' on him,

‘He may have mended his ways since then,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘He has not,’ replied Mark.

‘Because a man has done wrong once, ought he never to be given another chance?’ asked Philip.

Mark thought it curious he should ask him such a question, and answered :

‘Most men deserve to have more than one chance, some several chances ; but there are exceptions, and Devereux is one of them.’

‘Then you have no faith in him whatever?’

‘No.’

‘You think him a shark?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then I will convince you you are wrong,’ said Thwaites.

Mark smiled as he replied :

‘That I am sure you can never do.’

‘Last night I played hazard with Devereux, and he lost heavily and paid me. As we left the rooms he said he was a bit hard up, and asked me if I would buy a ring from him. I thought it curious he should be so hard up as that, and questioned him. He replied that a run of bad luck had set in against him, but that it was sure to change. I said I would lend him a tenner, if he wished, to go on with, but he said :

“No, I never borrow money now. I once got into a terrible row over borrowing money, and I made up my mind never to do it again.”

‘He then handed me this ring,’ went on Philip Thwaites, showing Mark a heavy plain gold ring he had on his finger, ‘and asked me to give him ten pounds for it. I thought at first he might as well have borrowed the tenner I offered him, because the ring did not, at a glance, seem worth half that amount. When he handed it to me, however, and I felt its weight, I knew it was a grand bargain at the price. I never felt such a weight of gold in a solid plain ring before. There’s enough in it to make half a dozen ordinary rings. That’s not the action of a shark, is it, Mark?’

‘Not exactly,’ replied Mark, ‘but where did he get the ring?’

‘How the deuce should I know! You don’t suppose I asked him?’ replied Philip.

‘I should have done so,’ answered Mark; ‘but then I know what he is, and of what he is capable, which you do not.’

‘But surely you do not mean to insinuate he came by it otherwise than honestly?’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘I have no opinion how he came by it,’ said Mark.

‘Well, here it is,’ said Philip Thwaites, as he drew it off his finger and handed it to Mark. ‘Do you think it is worth a tenner?’

Mark Mellish was surprised when he felt the weight of it. As Philip Thwaites had said, there was sufficient gold in it to make half a dozen ordinary rings.

Mark examined it carefully, and saw nothing peculiar about it. It was merely a plain solid gold ring, but unusually heavy and massive. He handed it back, saying :

‘ I am rather surprised he let you have that for ten pounds.’

‘ I thought you would be,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘ And I should very much like to know where he got it.’

‘ Why ?’

‘ For no particular reason.’

‘ I’m going to make a present of it,’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘ Are you ? To whom ?’

‘ Olive.’

‘ It is much too heavy and massive for her,’ said Mark.

‘ Of course it is,’ said Philip, ‘ but when it is her property she can do as she likes with it, and I shall offer a suggestion as to its future disposal.’

‘ Indeed !’ said Mark indifferently.

‘ Yes, indeed. You have no occasion to be so nasty about it.’

‘ I did not intend to be nasty,’ replied Mark.

‘ But you were, and you can be deuced nasty at times,’ said Philip. ‘ I am going to give it to Olive so that she can make a present of it to Herbert Verney. Do you see the drift of my intentions now ?’

‘ Quite,’ replied Mark, laughing. ‘ It is not a bad

idea, and I am sure Mr. Verney will appreciate any gift from Olive, but for all that, I had rather you had bought it in a shop, and not from Devereux.'

'What difference can it make, except in the price it would have cost? I should have had to pay twice as much for it in a shop.'

'Probably,' replied Mark, 'and for my part I had rather you had done so.'

'I am not so flush of money as all that,' replied Thwaites.

'Anyway, take my advice and do not have much to say to Charles Devereux. No good can come of it, mark my words.'

They parted, and Philip Thwaites said to himself :

'I have often been told once Mark Mellish got his knife into a man it stuck there, and, by Jove! it's true. What a down he has on Devereux! For my part, I rather like him, and I certainly do not see much of the shark in him.'

At a later date Philip Thwaites was to be undeceived.

When he arrived home, much earlier than usual, he found Olive alone, reading, her mother having gone to bed.

'I am glad you are up,' he said; 'I have a little surprise for you.'

She looked up with girlish pleasure and eagerness. Her father took the ring he had shown Mark

Mellish from his pocket. He had purchased a case for it, and the jeweller had confirmed his opinion of its quality.

‘It is the most massive and handsome ring of its kind I have ever seen,’ said the man, who had in his time handled many precious things.

‘What do you think of that, Olive?’ he said, opening the case and handing it to her.

‘It is beautiful!’ she exclaimed. ‘Such pure gold, and how massive!’

‘And feel the weight,’ he said.

Olive lifted it out of the purple lining carefully and was surprised at its weight.

‘It must be very valuable,’ she said.

‘It is. The jeweller said it was the best of its kind he had ever seen. I bought it for you; and why do you think I bought it? You see it is not a lady’s ring. Give a guess.’

Olive thought for a few moments and then said, delightedly :

‘As a gift for Herbert—Mr. Verney.’

‘You’ve hit it,’ said her father.

‘How good of you. He will be pleased with it, but not half so delighted as I shall be to give it to him,’ said Olive.

‘I am afraid I do not think of you as often as I ought to do,’ he said, ‘but let this make some amends for my neglect.’

Olive kissed him—she seldom did so—and Philip

Thwaites felt the satisfaction of having done one of the few unselfish actions of his life.

‘When shall you give it him?’ asked her father.

‘I have an idea,’ said Olive.

‘What is it?’

‘I will keep it until we are married and then slip it on to his finger as we return from the church. He will put a wedding-ring on my finger and I will place this on his,’ said Olive.

‘Quite a novel idea,’ said Philip, laughing; ‘but do you not think you will forget it on that exciting and eventful occasion?’

‘No; why should I? There is much more to be pleased than alarmed at on such a day,’ said Olive.

‘There certainly ought to be,’ was her father’s reply.

Olive was pleased with the ring, and pleased with her idea, which as her father had said was certainly a novel one.

When Olive retired for the night, however, he did not follow her good example, but left the house again and went to one of his usual haunts. He expected to meet Devereux, but he did not.

At the Club he found the betting on the Newmarket and Cup brisk, and as it was well known he was standing in with Mark Mellish over Talisman and Glen Innes, several bookmakers took long shots with him about sundry doubles in which those horses’ names were not mentioned.

There is a good deal of backing and laying between members of the fraternity, and they appear to indulge in fielding amongst themselves just to keep their hands in during a slack time.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ORDINARY MORTAL

THE Autumn Meeting of the V. R. C. was at hand, and many sporting men from New South Wales and other colonies had already arrived in Melbourne. Although not such a big draw as the Spring meeting, when the Cup is decided, the Newmarket Handicap and Australian Cup are races upon which a large amount of speculation takes place.

There is always keen rivalry between the Melbourne and Sydney trainers on such occasions, and it is not at all palatable to the former when the big prizes go over the border.

Herbert Verney and Mark Mellish had arrived, and so had their horses, under the charge of Sam Sandycroft. Both Talisman and Glen Innes were fancied, and were well backed by the public, who knew they were certain of a good run for their money. Tear-away was as good a favourite as anything, and now his money was on, at a fair price, St. Rollox made no secret of the fact that he thought his horse would win.

The trial at Randwick alluded to by Mark Mellish had deceived St. Rollox as to the real chance possessed by Talisman, and he was confident of beating all the Randwick trained horses, whatever might happen with those at Flemington.

St. Rollox was more partial to Melbourne than Sydney. The gay life of the Victorian capital suited him, and he preferred it to the more solid delights of the elder city.

Tearaway had not been tried since he won the Handicap at Randwick, but St. Rollox thought it advisable his measure should be taken at Flemington before the Newmarket Handicap day. He knew it was useless to attempt to have a quiet trial at Flemington, so he determined to have as good a one as possible, and if Tearaway came successfully through the ordeal he would be a hot favourite for the race, which, in case he wished to hedge, would be advantageous to him.

So Tearaway was tried at Flemington early one morning, and both Herbert Verney and Mark Mellish saw the performance. It was a satisfactory trial—at least, so said the majority of touts and horse-watchers, who had timed the gallop, and now stood collected together in small groups comparing the result. It is a curious sight to see scores of men holding watches in their hands and timing the horses at work. They are all eager to put the watch on at the exact moment the horses break away for the gallop, and

exclamations of disappointment can be heard when, as they express it, the trainer has 'sneaked a go' on them. A second or two in timing a gallop makes a heap of difference, all the difference between a win and a lose, probably. It is remarkable how the watches vary, but not to any appreciable extent. In nine cases out of ten the owner of the watch is at fault because he does not know how to time horses properly. There is a good deal of art in timing, and it requires constant practice to become perfect.

The same morning Tearaway did his gallop Talisman had also done a rousing good go and his trainer was perfectly satisfied.

When work was over and the horses were being quietly walked about, with their clothing on, preparatory to being taken back to their stables, the various gallops were being discussed by those who had witnessed them.

It had been a morning's work of unusual interest, and no more gallops of the Newmarket Handicap cracks were likely to take place, as the race was to be decided on the Saturday. Men who had not made up their minds what to back must do so now, for there would be nothing more upon which to base their judgment.

There is nothing more confusing to the ordinary mortal who only takes a casual interest in racing than watching the gallops of horses in training for a big race.

When the men who train these horses find themselves puzzled, and make mistakes, surely there is some excuse for other folk, who are not initiated into the mysteries of training and gallops, doing so.

The ordinary mortal alluded to witnesses a good gallop, in which a horse moves splendidly, finishes full of dash and fire, and 'pulling over' his companion.

'That's the cove for my money!' says the ordinary mortal.

Five minutes later there is another rousing gallop, in which another horse in the race flashes past lengths ahead in front of a well and publicly tried stable-companion.

The ordinary mortal hesitates, and wonders whether after all he was right in saying about the other horse, 'That's the cove for my money!'

As he is summing up the chances of these horses in a state of dire perplexity, gallop number three takes place, and again confusion is made worse confounded, because the winner of this go has 'smashed the watch,' and done the fastest gallop of the morning.

Under these trying circumstances, what is the ordinary mortal to do? In the majority of cases he returns to Melbourne by an early train from New-market Station, and after purchasing the morning paper, glances over the betting list. He sees the

names of the horses he has just witnessed doing their work figuring prominently, and at about equal prices in the quotations. He arrives at the conclusion that he will postpone backing anything until he has had breakfast—a wise decision, because he cannot do otherwise. He then further decides to wait until the evening papers are out. He purchases a *Herald*, and although he has seen the horses at work that morning, he eagerly glances at the training reports to see what has been done. It is necessary for him to do so, because the ordinary mortal has a sad way of mixing up horses on the training track, where they look so very different and undistinguishable from what they appear on the racecourse with the colours up.

The same ordinary mortal, however, would be highly indignant if anyone questioned his ability to pick a certain horse out of a hundred others on the track. He would not, however, desire to be put to the test, but would shuffle and prevaricate, and say, 'Some other time.'

The ordinary mortal suffers much in backing horses, but it is entirely his own fault. Instead of meandering about the training track in the early morning, he ought to be between the sheets, for he will learn far more from his newspaper than he will ever glean on the track.

Sam Sandycroft, however, was not an ordinary mortal. No man at Flemington the morning Tear-

away did his final gallop knew more about racehorses and their ways—also the ways of their trainers and jockeys—than Sam Sandycroft.

The opinion of Mark Mellish's trainer was always worth having, because it was based on practical experience and more than ordinary skill and 'cute-ness. Sam saw things other clever people missed, and when he watched a gallop, it was seldom he stood near the finish.

At Flemington, for instance, he generally took up a position on a fence in the middle of the ground, and with a powerful pair of glasses watched the horses gallop round the track. He paid particular attention to Tearaway, because if there was one horse more than another he wished to beat in the New-market Handicap, it was St. Rollox's candidate.

Sam Sandycroft had discovered that his step-daughter Ruth was on far too intimate terms with Leo St. Rollox. When Sam made this discovery there was a scene, and Mrs. Sandycroft, who idolized her husband, was sorely grieved at his attack upon her daughter.

Ruth, however, was a sensible girl, and had already found out for herself that much of what Sam Sandycroft said about St. Rollox was true. She resented her stepfather's interference, however, but when the storm subsided, Ruth gave Leo St. Rollox to understand what her stepfather's wishes were, and she declined to meet him alone again.

Leo St. Rollox had begun to like Ruth, and he was desperately angry with Sam for interfering. Words passed between them, but there was no serious quarrel. They were, however, antagonistic, and it was this spirit that made Sam more determined than ever to beat Tearaway with Talisman.

During Tearaway's gallop Sam Sandycroft noticed signs that the horse was inclined to shirk his work—at least, this was the construction he placed upon his observations. He thought to himself:

‘It is a fast gallop, but I'm beggared if he liked it.

‘Beggared’ was a favourite word of Sam's, although he hoped never to be in such a condition, and certainly did not look like it.

‘Well, Sam, and what did you think of Tearaway's gallop?’ asked Mark Mellish, as he and Herbert Verney walked along the plantation drive towards the top of the hill.

‘It was a good gallop,’ said Sam cautiously, ‘and he made fast time, but it did not suit me altogether.’

‘No?’ said Mark in some surprise.

‘In which way did it not suit you?’ asked Herbert.

‘The horse galloped as though he was stale. They have been slipping a lot of fast work into him lately, and he's not the sort of horse to stand it.’

‘He seemed to finish all right,’ said Mark.

‘Probably,’ replied Sam; ‘but all through the gallop he did not move freely, and with the freshness and fondness for work he ought to have shown.’

‘Then you think Talisman holds him safe?’ asked Herbert.

‘I have always thought that,’ said Sam, ‘and after this morning’s gallop I am sure of it.’

Mark Mellish placed implicit faith in his trainer’s judgment, which was seldom at fault.

When he entered the Victorian Club the same afternoon betting on the Newmarket Handicap was proceeding briskly, and at night speculation became feverish.

The final gallops of the morning had brought forth the usual result. It is the trials and fast work of horses that make a rich harvest for members of the Ring.

Mark Mellish generally led the way when there was any serious opposition to a fancied candidate. Tearaway on the strength of his morning’s work had been installed favourite, and seemed likely to retain that position.

When Mark Mellish opened fire, however, there was a speedy change. The leviathan laid wagers against Tearaway to large amounts as fast as he could write them down, and when no more money was forthcoming for the favourite he extended the odds. This had the effect of bringing more money into the market for Tearaway, but Mark Mellish was equal to the occasion, and accommodated all comers.

‘Do you know anything?’ asked Philip Thwaites. ‘You are peppering Tearaway all right.’

‘You need not follow my lead,’ said Mark, ‘but I do not think he will win.’

When St. Rollox entered the Club he was surprised to find such strong opposition against his horse. He failed to understand it. Tearaway was still favourite, but the odds against him had extended. He soon found out it was Mark Mellish who was laying against Tearaway.

‘They fancy they can beat me with Talisman, I suppose,’ he thought with a smile, confident such would not be the case.

He went up to Mark and said :

‘What price my horse ?’

‘Eight to one,’ replied Mark.

‘You have laid tens.’

‘Yes, but not to big bets.’

‘Lay me five thousand to five hundred,’ said St. Rollox.

‘Very well,’ replied Mark, and booked it, adding ‘Again, if you wish it.’

St. Rollox hesitated. It was quite evident Mark Mellish knew something, or he would not offer to lay £10,000 to £1,000 against Tearaway.

‘No ; the wager I have taken will be sufficient,’ said St. Rollox. ‘Do you think you can beat me with Talisman ?’

‘That remains to be seen,’ replied Mark ; ‘but I think Mr. Verney’s horse is sure to run well.’

When Philip Thwaites left the Club, he went into

a tobacconist's shop in Burke Street, and here he met Charles Devereux.

At this time there were many such shops kept by bookmakers, and big wagers were often laid in them.

The proprietor of this particular place was a Jewish-looking fellow with ferret-like eyes, a hooked nose, and compressed lips. He was not a favourable specimen of his race by any means.

'What price Talisman?' asked Philip Thwaites.

'Fourteen to one.'

'I'll have two hundred at that price,' said Philip, who often had a wager in addition to his book.

'Tearaway will win easily,' said Devereux.

'How do you know?' asked Philip.

'I have good information, and I saw his gallop this morning. I have backed him to win a good stake,' said Devereux.

'Then you'll lose your money. Mellish is giving it him hot in the Club.'

'He's not always right.'

'But he is seldom wrong.'

'Come and have a hand at cards,' said Devereux.

'All right,' replied Philip; 'I have done at the Club for to-night.'

The two men went into a little back-room at the end of the shop, and sat down at a small table covered with green baize.

CHAPTER XXIII

LIGHT ON THE FELS MYSTERY

PLAYING cards in a stuffy room is not a congenial occupation to a man who revels in fresh air and the delights of a racecourse. To such men as Philip Thwaites and Charles Devereux, however, the green cloth has quite as much attraction as the greensward, and they were accustomed to sit at the tables for hours at a stretch. Cards, however, quickly proved too slow for them, and the rattle of the dice-box was soon heard.

Luck favoured Devereux, and he won rapidly. Philip Thwaites was only a moderately good loser; he quickly lost his temper if ruffled.

‘It is my turn to-night,’ said Devereux. ‘I was about cleared out the last time we met, when I sold you that ring. You got a bargain, let me tell you, and I did not care to part with it. Perhaps you will ask me to take it back to-night,’ he added jokingly.

‘I am not so hard up as that,’ replied Thwaites; ‘and even if I were you could not have the ring back.’

‘Why? Are you so proud of it?’

‘I have given it away?’

‘Who has it now?’

‘My daughter.’

‘It’s not a lady’s ring.’

‘No; but I gave it her to make a present to the

gentleman to whom she is engaged. I think he will like it.'

'He ought to do so,' replied Devereux, 'for it is a remarkable ring of its kind. Who is the lucky man?'

'I don't think you know him, but you have heard of him. He has a horse in the Newmarket Handicap that will beat your fancy, Tearaway.'

Philip Devereux held the dice-box, and was about to throw when something suddenly arrested his hand. He sat looking at his companion with a peculiar gaze.

'Throw!' said Philip Thwaites. 'What are you waiting for?'

Devereux threw and lost, the first time he had been unfortunate for half an hour.

'My turn now,' said Philip, 'there's going to be a change of luck.'

'I'm afraid so,' replied Devereux.

'It is about time. You have had it all your own way up to now,' said Philip Thwaites.

They went on playing, and Devereux continued to lose.

'At this rate I shall soon get my losses back,' said Philip.

He did not do so, however, for the luck changed again, and went over to Devereux's side. They paused for a rest, and Devereux said:

'Who is the gentleman your daughter is engaged to?'

‘Herbert Verney, the owner of Talisman,’ replied Thwaites.

Charles Devereux gave a slight start, which his companion failed to notice. With well-affected carelessness he said :

‘He is a nephew of John Verney, is he not, the man who was found dead at The Fells at Bathurst ?’

‘Yes. Do you know him ?’ asked Philip.

‘I have seen him several times, and I met his uncle at Bathurst.’

‘Strange affair, that mysterious death of John Verney’s,’ said Philip.

‘It was. Have you any opinion about it ?’

‘No ; why should I have an opinion about it different from other people ?’ asked Philip Thwaites, and there was a shade of anxiety in his voice.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said Devereux. ‘I merely thought you might have a notion as to how he came by his death.’

‘I only know the facts as stated at the inquest,’ said Philip.

‘And you believe that story ?’

‘Certainly I do.’

‘Then I don’t. I do not think it was a murder, I think John Verney died from heart-disease.’

‘You read the evidence ?’

‘Yes, very carefully.’

‘Then how do you account for both wrists being severed ?’ asked Philip Thwaites.

‘Easily enough. There must have been a knife on his desk, blade uppermost. Perhaps it was on the desk when John Verney staggered, and in trying to save himself from falling he may have accidentally turned it blade uppermost. Then, if he sank into his chair and put out his arms in the position in which he was discovered as stated at the inquest, his wrists may have fallen upon the upturned blade, and thus have been severed.’

Charles Devereux spoke rapidly and clearly, and Philip Thwaites said with a laugh:

‘You give such an excellent description of the scene, I can almost fancy you were present.’

‘Present!’ said Devereux, starting. ‘What do you mean?’

‘When the deed was discovered. You do not suppose I thought you saw it happen?’ said Philip Thwaites.

‘No, of course not. I have a vivid imagination, but it does not require the exercise of much ingenuity to imagine what I have told you.’

‘Your version appears probable,’ replied Thwaites. ‘Are you going to play again?’

‘No, I have had enough for one night, if you are agreeable. I am not a large winner; honours have been about equally divided,’ replied Charles Devereux.

‘Then I will go home,’ said Thwaites, rising from the table.

Charles Devereux seemed about to ask him a question, but changed his mind.

They went out of the shop, and walked down Burke Street together, separating at the corner of Queen Street.

Charles Devereux sat up when he arrived at his lodgings for a long time.

It was evident something had recently disturbed him, and caused him annoyance, not to say alarm.

Devereux's past life was not such an one as a man can look back upon with pleasure. He had been a bad lot from an early age, although his chances in life had been good, far better than those of many men who had made their mark in the world.

When Charles Devereux left England he first of all went to America, and after remaining there for some time, proceeded to the Cape. He made his way into the Transvaal, and was there when the war broke out, and was at the disaster of Majuba Hill, but in the Boer camp. He was a renegade, and had always been so, and there was no prospect of his ever changing. He had lived amongst the Boers and done no work, but had made himself useful to the Government in many underhand ways.

From the Cape, to which he returned from the Transvaal, he had come on to Australia, and had led the life of a gambler and racecourse hanger-on, living by his wits and on his fellow-men.

It was during a visit to Bathurst he met old John

Verney, and strange to say, that eccentric man seemed to find some useful qualities in Charles Devereux. One of these qualities was an aptitude on the part of Devereux for obtaining information about people who wished to borrow money from John Verney. Such information was useful, and John Verney did not object to pay for it, but he nevertheless showed plainly enough that he regarded Devereux with contempt, and his tool resented it.

No one knew of the relationship existing between Charles Devereux and old John Verney; it was essential to the work Devereux carried on for his employer that such should be the case. Devereux visited The Fells secretly, and owing to John Verney's habits this was easy enough.

There came a time when John Verney ceased to have any further use for his services, and he was given an abrupt dismissal. This he resented, and an angry scene took place in old John Verney's room at The Fells. There was no one in the house at the time. John Verney had taken good care of that, for the old man had plenty of courage, and knew no fear.

That scene came vividly before Charles Devereux as he sat in his room in the early hours of the morning. He saw John Verney in a towering passion unlock the safe at the side of his desk, and then, standing up and looking at him, fancied he heard him say again :

‘You have been well paid by me for what you have done, but I will give you five hundred pounds

to be quit of you for ever. I am sorry I had anything to do with such a scoundrel.'

Then he remembered replying :

'I am no more a scoundrel than yourself, John Verney. I have done your dirty work, but you have reaped the reward, and five hundred pounds is not too much for a parting gift.'

'A parting gift!' sneered the old man. 'It is no gift of mine. If you have earned the money, you shall have it, and may it help you on the road to perdition !'

Then John Verney staggered backwards, suddenly wheeled round, clutched at the desk and sank into his chair, his arms falling heavily on the top of the desk.

Charles Devereux recalled that scene vividly. He remembered how he waited for John Verney to move, and how he did not move, and after a few minutes of dreadful suspense he crept cautiously up to him, placed his hand on his shoulder and found no life in him. The suddenness of the whole thing appalled him, stupefied him, and he dared not move. Then he saw a sight which filled him with horror, and made him start back from the dead man.

Both John Verney's hands were covered with blood, and the crimson stream dripped down on to the floor. Recovering himself, Charles Devereux recalled how he again stole up to John Verney to ascertain the cause of this flow of blood, unaccountably yet horribly

plain to see. He soon found out the reason for it. On the desk was a large knife with a dullish blade. It was an old Indian knife, so he thought, and as he placed his hand upon it John Verney must have turned the blade uppermost, his wrists falling heavily upon it. He began to realize the danger he was in if discovered. He would be accused of murder and attempted robbery, because the safe was open and——

Devereux recollected how he had paused here and thought : ‘The safe is open ; why not abstract the contents ?’ No sooner thought of than acted upon. He pulled open the safe, and a gold ring rolled out. He picked it up and placed it in his pocket, and then commenced to search for the notes. He found none, but his hands trembled, and he could hardly move the papers about. There was a small bag of sovereigns, and he emptied them into his hand, one or two rolling out. He fancied he heard footsteps, and hastily left the room. He went round to the stable-yard, and with a key he had found in John Verney’s desk, opened the door of Hereward’s box. He recollected this was Hereward’s box, because John Verney had once shown him the horse. He saddled Hereward, but just as he was about to mount him outside the yard, the horse started off and bolted down the drive. In the dim light he fancied he saw a man walking along the road, and at once hurried off across the field.

He thought over these things, and cursed himself for bringing that ring away, and still more so for parting with it to Philip Thwaites. Was it fatality that the ring should be given to Herbert Verney in such a strange manner? Would Herbert Verney recognise it? Probably not, for the ring must have been kept by John Verney in his safe, and he might not have shown it to his nephew. Even had he done so, there was nothing by which such a ring could be identified. It was of pure solid gold, plain, with no distinguishing marks upon it. There might be scores of rings like it.

He debated what course of action he had better take. To ask Philip Thwaites to let him have it back might arouse suspicion as to where he had obtained it. Thwaites might not think he had come by it honestly, and was therefore anxious to recover it. On the whole, he thought the better plan would be to let matters take their course. Herbert Verney would never recognise it, even if his uncle had shown it to him, because it was Olive Thwaites' gift, and he would never dream of its being in her possession. It was a strange coincidence that this ring should be returned to Herbert Verney.

'There was no murder done,' said Devereux, arguing with himself. 'It was death from heart-disease, such as that doctor at the inquest described. I only took a few paltry pounds and the ring—curse it!—and he had offered me five hundred. How could I act otherwise than I did then? How could I have explained

my presence there and the situation in which I was found? I had no other course open to me except to make a bolt of it. He was a hard nut to crack, old John Verney, and although he paid me well I did some nasty work for him. He's dead and gone, and I'm thankful I did not kill him. It would be a difficult matter to prove my innocence if the true facts came to light; but they never will. I wish I had thrown that ring away when I felt inclined to do so. What a fool I was to sell it to Philip Thwaites! But I was deuced hard up, and that tenner gave me a lucky rise in the world again.'

Clearly Charles Devereux had placed himself in a false and dangerous position, a position bearing a strong resemblance to that of Philip Thwaites. The two men who could have thrown light upon John Verney's death were bound by self-interest to remain silent, and yet Charles Devereux was totally ignorant of the part Philip Thwaites had played in the tragic affair, and Philip Thwaites was equally in the dark as to all Devereux had seen and done.

CHAPTER XXIV

TALISMAN SHOWS FIGHT

'It's all right, he's sure to beat Tearaway, you need have no fear on that point.'

The speaker was Sam Sandycroft, who was addressing Herbert Verney.

‘And if he beats Tearaway, you think he will win?’

‘I do; but there is always a lot of luck in such a race as the Newmarket Handicap. It is only six furlongs, and one never can tell what may happen in a scramble. I have seldom felt more confident of winning a race,’ replied the trainer.

It was an animated scene at Flemington, and for an Autumn Meeting there was a large crowd. Of all the racecourses in Australia the palm must be awarded to the headquarters of the Victorian Racing Club, although Randwick, Sydney, runs it close.

In the paddock, however, there was comparative quiet, and the horses were saddled with comfort.

Mark Mellish was busy in the Ring. He stood against the railings surrounding the members’ enclosure, and not far from the weighing-room. It was evident Mark was a man of importance in the Ring, and all the big wagers, or the bulk of them, went into his book. The greater part of his business was transacted over the railings with members of the Club and the prominent sportsmen who thronged the enclosure.

It would have been a very heavy wager indeed for Mark Mellish to pause before laying it, and so far he had no hesitation in booking all the bets asked for.

One prominent backer, a member of the Club, accepted eight ‘monkeys’ about Tearaway, and then said to Mark:

‘I hear Talisman has a chance.’

‘Yes, Mr. ———, he has a good chance,’ replied Mark, ‘and I think he will beat the one you have backed.’

‘What odds will you lay me?’

‘I cannot lay Talisman; he is in my stable, and I never lay against horses in my own stable,’ replied Mark.

‘Then I’ll back him elsewhere.’

‘I do not think you will regret doing so,’ said Mark.

It was such replies as these made Mark Mellish popular. When asked about the chance of a horse in his stable, he always gave a straightforward answer.

Charles Devereux went to the course in an apprehensive frame of mind. He had a dread something untoward was about to happen. He made up his mind to have a plunge on Tearaway, and if it came off to leave Australia. He had decided that the ring he had so foolishly sold to Philip Thwaites might get him into serious trouble when it came into the hands of Herbert Verney. Luckily, he had time given him, and there was no necessity for immediate action. Although guiltless of any complicity in John Verney’s death, he knew there was a strong chain of circumstantial evidence against him, forged by a number of strange coincidences. He went into the paddock, and the first horse he saw was Talisman, and standing close by were Herbert Verney and Sam Sandycroft. He knew them by sight, as most racing men did, and thought:

‘I must save on Talisman, as he is the first horse I have seen in the paddock.’

Charles Devereux was as superstitious as many racing men, and a firm believer in signs and luck. He knew Talisman was a good horse and a certain ‘trier,’ and that if Tearaway was beaten this horse would be the one to do it. He also recalled what Philip Thwaites had said about Talisman beating Tearaway.

He was not a bad judge of a horse. Constant attendance at race-meetings had given him an average superficial knowledge of when a horse was fit, and he certainly thought Talisman looked well. When he returned into the Ring he made an investment on Herbert Verney’s horse.

Herbert Verney was anxious to win the Handicap, if only for the pleasure it would afford him to beat St. Rollox. There was keen rivalry between them, and he knew how mortified St. Rollox would be if Talisman, a horse he had sold out of his stable, beat Tearaway.

Moreover, Herbert Verney had a large stake in the race, for Mark Mellish had an exceptionally heavy book, and he was standing in with him.

Leaving Sam Sandycroft in the paddock, he went into the Ring and sought out Mark Mellish.

‘There’s a lot of heavy wagering on the race,’ said Mark, ‘and it seems to me St. Rollox has put all his

friends on Tearaway, for the horse has been backed for a heap of money.'

'All the better for us if we beat him,' said Herbert. 'What else are they backing?'

'Monteagle, Burwah, and Omrah, of our lot from Sydney, and Peggy, Toorak, Wallaby, and one or two more of the Victorians,' said Mark.

'We ought to beat all that lot,' replied Herbert; and then, seeing Mark was busy, he went to find Murchison, the jockey.

Murchison was brimful of confidence, and thought Talisman was sure to win.

Herbert Verney determined to back his horse again, independent of Mark Mellish, and he found no difficulty in doing so at ten to one.

Tearaway was a hot favourite, and the bookmakers appeared to have plenty of money to lay against any of the others. Having secured a good wager about his horse, he went into the paddock again to see Talisman go out on to the track.

The sky-blue jacket was conspicuous, and he quickly discovered Murchison. The jockey was very anxious to beat Alec Moss on Tearaway, and thus prove he was right about the form at Randwick.

'Just remember one thing, Ted,' said Sam Sandycroft. 'Get well away, and keep in the front rank. Talisman has plenty of speed, and he will last it out. Six furlongs will just suit him, and if you do as I tell you it will be a fast run race, and a lot of

them will have had enough of it a long way from home.'

'All right, Sam,' replied the jockey. 'You have never found me throwing away a chance in a six-furlong race when I got a good start.'

'No; I'll give you credit for that,' replied the trainer.

'I'm glad you give me a small amount of credit sometimes,' laughed Murchison.

'Do you think Talisman fit?' asked Herbert Verney, with a sly wink at the jockey. He knew what arguments the trainer and Murchison had on this question.

'Ted's a good jockey,' said Sam Sandycroft; 'but he is not much of a judge as to whether a horse is fit.'

'Talisman looks pretty well,' said Ted, in answer to Herbert Verney's question.

'Looks pretty well,' exclaimed Sam indignantly. 'I should say he did.'

'But horses belie their looks sometimes,' said the jockey.

'You'll find it is not so in this case; but get into the saddle and stop talking. I have trained the horse, and all you have to do is to win on him,' said Sam.

'And that is a matter of no importance?' said Murchison chaffingly.

'You'll find out it is a matter of importance if you lose,' growled Sam.

The trainer and jockey understood each other, and for all their bickerings were excellent friends.

Herbert Verney smiled at the 'sparring' between them and said :

'If Talisman wins, I will divide five hundred between you.'

They both thanked him, and the jockey said :

'I feel confident the money is as good as won.'

'I hope so,' said Herbert.

'Sure of it,' laconically answered Sam.

When the horses went out of the paddock on to the course Sam Sandycroft and Herbert Verney walked through the Ring to the lawn and took up a position on the terrace. There was no uncomfortable crowding, and they were able to obtain a good view of the course. As the horses went past the stand for their preliminary canter Sam Sandycroft said :

'I am told Toorak is a nasty-tempered brute. I ought to have warned Ted to steer clear of him. If Talisman is kicked, it will not only injure his chance, but make him lose his temper.'

'Has Talisman a bad temper?' asked Herbert. 'I have not heard you speak of it before.'

'He is one of the best-tempered horses in the stable until he is roused, but when anything upsets him he can play the deuce!'

'How did you find that out?' asked Herbert.

'One morning after exercise Firefly lashed out at him, and Talisman not only returned the compliment

but tried to "savage" him into the bargain,' said the trainer.

The horses were now galloping past, and the favourite, Tearaway, went in rare form, gaining hosts of friends by his resolute style of moving.

'He's very fit,' said Sam, 'but I'll stick to what I said after that gallop the other morning. I think he's a trifle too fit, and he must have done a power of work.'

'There's Talisman!' exclaimed Herbert. 'I am sure no horse could move better than he does.'

'He's a beauty,' replied the trainer, as he watched every movement of the horse, and noted the effect of the preparation he had given him.

Toorak went well, but laid his ears back in ominous fashion. Wallaby had a lot of dash about him, and Omrah's style was much liked.

When the twenty horses had gone past, Herbert said:

'If I had my pick, I should still select Talisman.'

'Same here,' replied Sam, 'and I know he is as fit as hands can make him.'

The jockeys turned their horses and were going down to the starting-post, when an unexpected and exciting incident took place.

Toorak and Talisman were alongside, and Murchison was evidently making a remark to Ward, who was on Toorak, when the horse lashed out and just missed striking Herbert Verney's horse in the flank.

Sam Sandycroft muttered something about consigning such horses to the bottomless pit, when Herbert Verney exclaimed :

‘Look at Talisman ! He’ll have Murchison off if he is not careful.’

Talisman strongly resented the attack made upon him, but instead of lashing out, he jumped on to Toorak and commenced to bite him. A desperate fight took place between the two infuriated animals, and they went at it in deadly earnest. Talisman unshipped Murchison (who managed to roll clear of the horses), and then galloped down the course.

‘Here’s a pretty mess !’ said Herbert. ‘I’m glad Murchison is not hurt. I’m afraid our chance is gone now.’

Sam Sandycroft had disappeared from his side, and Herbert Verney saw him climbing over the fence on to the course. No attempt was made to stop the trainer—he had been too quick for that—and he ran up to Murchison.

‘Are you hurt, Ted ?’ he asked anxiously.

‘No, I’m not hurt ; a bit shaken up, that’s all. It’s a d—— bad job this, Sam.’

‘You bet it is, but we must do the best we can. I only hope Talisman is all right. We have a chance yet if he has not hurt himself.’

They looked up the course and saw Talisman had come to a standstill of his own accord, and a man, slipping under the railings, caught him by the bridle.

Talisman was quiet enough now, and the man led him down the track towards the trainer and jockey.

Sam Sandycroft examined the horse carefully, and was apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, for he said :

‘ There’s nothing the matter with him, Ted, and you need have no fear about riding him as I told you.’

When Murchison got into the saddle again he was loudly cheered, and everyone was glad no serious harm had happened to either horse or rider.

As Murchison cantered Talisman down the course, Sam Sandycroft, putting his hand in his pocket, and taking out a sovereign, handed it to the man who had brought the horse down the course, saying :

‘ Here’s a quid for you, and I am much obliged to you.’

‘ Thank you,’ replied the man. ‘ I’ll put it on Talisman for luck.’

‘ Do as you please,’ replied Sam, ‘ but I can assure you you will have a good run for your money.’

‘ Then here goes,’ replied the man, ‘ and I hope I shall turn it into ten more sovereigns.’

‘ I hope so, too,’ said Sam, ‘ but you’ll have to hurry up or they will be off.’

CHAPTER XXV

A WIN AND A MATCH

SAM SANDYCROFT had only just returned to Herbert Verney, on the terrace, when the barrier flew up and

the horses were off. It was, as usual with the starting machine, an excellent start, but the line was quickly broken and the red jacket and black cap of Omrah were easily distinguishable in the lead. Close handy was the rogue Toorak, with Peggy on his right. Then came Tearaway, and racing alongside him the sky-blue jacket shone conspicuously.

When the horses had gone a couple of furlongs it was evident half of them had very little chance of winning. It is surprising how quickly horses tail off in a six-furlong race when the pace is a cracker.

As they came over the tan crossing Omrah had fallen back and Toorak held the lead.

‘I wish that beggar was at the other end of the field,’ said Sam anxiously. ‘If he sticks there and Talisman races up alongside him, there is no telling what may happen.’

There was no chance of the trainer’s wish being realized, for Toorak, although he might be a rogue, got over the ground at a great pace. He was an outsider, and the bookmakers, with the exception perhaps, of Mark Mellish and Philip Thwaites, were glad to see this fifty to one chance in front.

The jockey on Toorak wore a white jacket, and there is nothing easier to distinguish at a distance in a race than a white jacket, which made Toorak’s position look more prominent still.

‘He’s got a lead of several lengths,’ said Herbert Verney. ‘They will never catch him.’

‘If anything gets alongside him, he’ll cut it,’ said Sam. ‘Those rogues always show the white feather when they are tackled.’

At the head of the remainder of the field were Tearaway, Talisman and Wallaby, all going well, but apparently hopelessly chasing the outsider.

At the end of four furlongs Toorak looked one of the easiest winners of the Newmarket on record, and his defeat was highly improbable, at least, so thought the majority of those present.

The ‘ordinary mortal’ mentioned in a previous chapter looked at Toorak in sheer amazement. Here was a complete upsetting of all his plans and calculations, the utter annihilation of hopes founded upon morning gallops, time test, and trials. The ‘ordinary mortal’ had backed half a dozen horses in the race, and Toorak was not amongst the number. Really it was very sad, and he had much cause for lamentation.

Murchison, seeing Toorak still held a formidable lead, thought it high time to try and lessen the gap between them. He gave Talisman to understand it was now or never, and that a special effort must be made. The horse took the hint and put on a spurt that astonished Alec Moss on Tearaway.

Moss lost no time in sending Tearaway along in pursuit of Herbert Verney’s horse, and he was soon

on level terms again. Neither, however, had the measure of Toorak, who still held a comfortable lead.

‘If ever there was a surprise, this is one,’ said Sam Sandycroft. ‘Toorak never entered into my calculations as a probable winner, but he looks very like it.’

‘There’s nothing to beat him,’ said Herbert Verney. ‘There is only one consolation—he will be a good horse for the book.’

‘Not much doubt about that,’ replied Sam.

Mark Mellish knew differently. Just before the horses went to the post he had laid the owner of Toorak the large wager of £10,000 to £200. When Mark saw the battle between Toorak and Talisman he thought it was a bit of bad luck for him, and now Toorak was sailing ahead it made it worse.

Mark watched the race closely, and having seen hundreds of races decided, he knew Toorak’s chance was a very good one. The majority of the book-makers were almost certain the outsider would win, and their faces beamed with delight.

Toorak still held the lead a furlong from home, but the sky-blue jacket had drawn dangerously near, and the primrose and rose cap of Tearaway’s jockey was handy.

‘We’ve got a chance yet,’ said Sam Sandycroft. ‘Talisman is full of running, and will last out every yard of the distance.’

‘The question is, will Murchison have time to get him up?’ replied Herbert.

Ted Murchison had a wholesome dread of Toorak. He knew Talisman was a peculiar horse, and that as likely as not if he got alongside Toorak something would happen. On this account he rode Talisman wide on the outside, and nine people out of ten considered he was riding a bad race. He was doing just the opposite. It was advisable for him to keep Talisman clear of Toorak, and Sam Sandycroft knew this, and approved of what the jockey had done.

‘He’s throwing the race away, pulling out wide like that. D——d bad riding, I call it.’

Sam turned round to the speaker, and said :

‘Then you know nothing at all about it ; he is riding a grand race.’

‘And pray how much do you know about it?’ was the retort.

‘I know a little about it. I trained the horse, and I am satisfied.’

The ‘ordinary mortal’ held his peace. Seeing Talisman running out wide, Alec Moss thought it a good opportunity to slip in between Talisman and Toorak, who was on the rails. The judgment displayed by Ted Murchison in pulling Talisman clear of Toorak then became apparent. No sooner did Tearaway race up level with Toorak than the outsider not only unmistakably cut it, but he tried to ‘savage’ Tearaway. This caused St. Rollox’s horse

to falter, and he was thrown out of his stride ; and before Moss could get him into it again Talisman was a length in front.

‘Now do you understand what I mean ?’ said Sam, turning to the man who had made disparaging remarks about Murchison’s riding.

‘Yes, and I acknowledge I made a mistake,’ was the reply.

Sam was mollified, and said :

‘I expect you have a bit on Talisman ; that makes all the difference.’

‘I have, and he’ll win,’ replied the man excitedly, as he shouted, ‘Talisman wins !’

Tearaway, however, was not yet done with, and Alec Moss was making vigorous efforts to get on terms with Talisman.

Despite the gallant struggle made by the favourite, Talisman held the lead, and the sky-blue jacket was first past the post, a clear couple of lengths in front of the primrose. It was an unsatisfactory finish—at least, so all the backers of the favourite thought, and opinions were freely expressed that but for Toorak’s interference Tearaway would have won.

St. Rollox was angry and disappointed, and considered he had had very bad luck indeed. He did not blame Alec Moss, and there was nothing to be gained by protesting against Toorak. Moss, when questioned, said

‘If Toorak had not interfered with him, I should

have won quite as comfortably as Talisman. It's wretched bad luck, that's what I call it.'

'What do you think of it, Sam?' asked Herbert Verney.

'I think if Murchison had ridden the race in any other way, we should have lost,' replied the trainer.

'Do you think Tearaway ought to have won?'

'Under the circumstances, perhaps he ought to have done so; but had Talisman been able to run a clear, straight course without coming wide on the outside, I think he would have beaten Tearaway quite as easily had Mr. St. Rollox's horse not been interfered with.'

Herbert Verney saw Mark Mellish, who said they had had a 'very good race,' and won a big stake.

'I think we had a bit of luck, all the same,' he said.

'Perhaps we had,' replied Herbert; 'but Sam thinks if Murchison had not run Talisman out wide, and Tearaway had not been interfered with, we should have won quite as easily.'

Later on Herbert Verney met Leo St. Rollox in the paddock, and St. Rollox said:

'I congratulate you on your victory, but you must acknowledge the luck was all on your side. If that brute Toorak had not interfered with my horse, he would have won.'

'It was not in Talisman's favour when Toorak kicked at him before the race, and caused him to

throw Murchison; you must make some allowance for that.'

'But that did not happen in the race,' said St. Rollox, 'which is a very different matter.'

'Sam Sandycroft thinks Talisman would have won under any circumstances. The horse ran out wide, and lost a lot of ground; but it was a judicious move on the part of Murchison to give Toorak a wide berth.'

'Yes, he rode a good race, and I think it is solely due to his riding that Talisman won.'

'I must differ from you there,' replied Herbert. 'Talisman is a good horse.'

'I know exactly what Talisman is, having owned him until you bought him, and have no hesitation in saying Tearaway is the better of the pair. Moss says he would have won for a certainty had Toorak been out of the way.'

'I confess it is an unsatisfactory race,' said Herbert, and then, after a pause, added: 'Will you match your horse against mine at the same weights they carried in the Newmarket for a reasonable stake?'

'Certainly,' replied St. Rollox, without the least hesitation, for he thought it would be a good thing for his horse.

'How much for?' asked Herbert.

'Suppose we say five hundred a side?'

'That will suit me,' replied Herbert.

'And when shall we run it off?' asked St. Rollox.

'On Tuesday, Australian Cup day,' said Herbert, 'if it can be arranged, for I am anxious to return to Sydney.'

'Metal more attractive there?' said St. Rollox, smiling. 'When does the happy event come off?'

'It has not been arranged yet,' said Herbert, somewhat stiffly.

'I wish you joy, anyway,' said St. Rollox. 'You have secured a charming bride.'

'Who is to see the Stewards and arrange about the match?' asked Herbert, to change the conversation.

'I will leave it with you. I think you know one or two members of the committee.'

'I will see them before we leave the course,' replied Herbert, 'and let you know the result.'

He had no difficulty in arranging for the match to be run on Tuesday, as the Stewards knew it would be a draw, and would not interfere with the regular programme.

Herbert told Mark Mellish what he had done, and the bookmaker quite approved of it.

Not so Sam Sandycroft. The trainer said :

'You will throw away your chance in a big handicap by winning this match, and it is not worth the candle.'

However, the match being made and duly ratified, Sam Sandycroft determined Talisman should win it if possible, and he was sanguine of success.

The news that Talisman had been matched against

Tearaway for five hundred aside created a great amount of interest in sporting circles. Backers of the favourite commended St. Rollox for making such a match, because the majority of them thought they were unlucky to lose their money. A considerable number of people who won money over Talisman were also of opinion Tearaway was unlikely to be beaten. There was every prospect of the match provoking some spirited speculation, and it threatened to eclipse the interest in the Cup, for which Glen Innes was favourite, after the victory of his stable companion in the Newmarket Handicap. A lot of double money had been laid against Talisman and Glen Innes, and much of it had to be hedged at a short price.

At the Victorian Club during the evening of the Handicap Day, Mark Mellish laid a level thousand that Talisman beat Tearaway in the match, and this caused Herbert Verney's horse to be a slight favourite. As the evening went on, however, the effect of Mark's wager evaporated, and towards midnight slight odds were once or twice laid on Leo St. Rollox's horse.

CHAPTER XXVI

TALISMAN SCORES AGAIN

GLEN INNES won the Australian Cup, but only by a head, after a terrific race over the two miles and a

quarter. The victory of Mark Mellish's horse was well received, and he landed a big stake over the double.

Charles Devereux was lucky enough to have won money over Glen Innes, and the possession of coin seemed to give him increased courage, and he half resolved to remain in Australia and take any risk that might attach to the ring, which would shortly be in Herbert Verney's possession.

The match between Tearaway and Talisman was to come off before the last race, and the wagering over it was spirited. The partisans of each horse were about equally divided, and each party was sanguine of success.

The race for the Newmarket Handicap did not appear to have done Talisman any harm, and Sam Sandycroft thought the horse was even better than on the day he won. Tearaway looked somewhat dull in his coat and had a jaded appearance, but St. Rollox was confident of success, and backed him for a large sum.

Riding a match is very different to riding a race, and Sam Sandycroft knew that Murchison would show to the best advantage in the coming struggle. Alec Moss, however, was more accustomed to riding races, and was not over-sanguine about the result of the match. He kept his opinion to himself, however, and St. Rollox had no idea what his jockey's feelings were.

Ted Murchison met Alec Moss in the jockeys' room, and said :

'What do you think of it, Alec ?'

'We ought to run a dead heat, or thereabouts, judging by the form shown on Saturday.'

'I fancy Talisman will just beat you,' said Ted.

'He may do so, but Tearaway ought to have won the Newmarket.'

'I don't think so,' replied Ted. 'I lost a lot of ground in the race.'

'But you were sensible not to come within reach of that brute Toorak.'

'I had no desire to be thrown again,' laughed Ted, 'and if Talisman had raced alongside Toorak, he would probably have wanted to settle old scores with him.'

'Have you anything on the match ?' asked Alec.

'No ; and do not intend having a wager. I won a good stake over the Newmarket.'

'And I lost more than I care to pay,' said Alec.

'I thought Tearaway a real good thing.'

'You were not the only one ; but Sam Sandycroft does not make many mistakes, and he considered Talisman had a real good chance.'

'Clever fellow, Sam !' said Alec.

'You bet he is ! and although he has a temper and a sharp tongue, he is a downright good sort.'

They left the jockeys' room together, and after weighing out, went into the paddock.

The two horses were being led about, and were ready saddled.

‘We shall beat you again to-day,’ said Sam Sandycroft to Alec.

‘Don’t be too sure about that,’ replied the jockey; ‘the luck will not always stick to you as it did on Saturday.’

‘There was not much luck about it,’ replied the trainer, ‘as you will see to-day.’

On all sides it was acknowledged the match was a genuine sporting affair, and when the horses came on to the track they were greeted with a hearty cheer.

The preliminaries were soon over, and they went down to the post.

Meanwhile Mark Mellish had closed his book, and was busily engaged in backing Talisman with any bookmaker who cared to lay him. They were somewhat chary, however, in betting with Mark, because they knew he was a shrewd man, and seldom threw his money away.

He joined Herbert Verney and Sam Sandycroft on the stand to watch the race, and they had not long to wait before the horses were off.

Alec Moss meant business this time. Murchison had expected him to wait upon Talisman, but instead of doing so, he went away at a great pace and got a lead of two or three lengths.

This did not suit Murchison, and he endeavoured

at once to get on level terms, but much to his chagrin, found he could not do so. A break of two or three lengths in a match over six furlongs means a lot to the leader, and Moss was determined if possible to maintain his advantage.

There was to be no waiting this journey, of that he was determined, and glancing round, he was delighted to find Talisman had not gained upon him.

The pace was terrific, and Ted Murchison, who, as Sam Sandycroft expressed it, was 'a beggar to think,' began to wonder how long it would last. Like the sensible jockey he was, when he found Talisman doing his best, he refrained from attempting to make him do more. Many jockeys fail to comprehend the all-important fact that a horse can do no more than his best, no matter where he may be running in a race.

The jockey knew Talisman could not go faster, and from this he argued that Tearaway must be galloping at a higher rate of speed than he had ever before shown.

'It cannot last long,' thought Murchison; 'he'll never get to the end of six furlongs at this rate.'

On the stand Sam Sandycroft took in the situation accurately.

'They are going at a deuce of a pace,' said Sam.

'And Tearaway has a handy lead,' replied Mark.

'It is no use Ted trying to overhaul him at that pace,' said Sam, 'and he has the sense not to do so.'

If he loses no ground, we shall win, for I am certain Tearaway will crack up before the finish.'

Leo St. Rollox was already indulging in the anticipated pleasures of victory, and thinking what bad luck he had to lose the Newmarket.

'It will take a better horse than Talisman to catch Tearaway,' he thought, 'and I am glad Alec has the sense to keep going.'

When five furlongs had been covered Tearaway was still a couple of lengths in front; but Moss knew the horse was labouring, and not galloping so freely as in the earlier part of the race.

Gradually Talisman crept nearer. At first the gain was scarcely perceptible, but Murchison noted it, and his hopes rose high.

'A furlong to go,' he muttered, 'and a couple of lengths to make up. I shall just do it.'

He did not bustle Talisman, but kept him going steadily at the same pace, and yard by yard he gained on the leader.

'We're catching him,' said Sam. 'The race is as good as won.'

'I wish he were a trifle nearer,' said Mark.

'It is a lot of ground to make up in a furlong,' said Herbert.

'He'll do it comfortably,' replied Sam.

Leo St. Rollox was growing anxious. The gap between the two horses had lessened considerably, and Tearaway's chance did not by any means look

such a good one. Still, the judges' box was close at hand, and Talisman would have to put in an uncommonly brilliant run to win.

St. Rollox knew Talisman was a genuine horse, and tried his best, but when he owned him he had never discovered much brilliancy about him. He did not consider Talisman the kind of horse to come with a terrific rush at the finish and win on the post ; that was, he thought, more in Tearaway's line.

Brilliant or otherwise, there was no mistaking the shout which proclaimed that Talisman had drawn up alongside Tearaway, and that a desperate finish was certain. The jockeys were equally matched, although Murchison was perhaps slightly the better in a race of this description.

It was an exciting moment for Herbert Verney when he saw the sky-blue jacket forging steadily ahead. He loved to see a close finish, and it thrilled him through and through when Talisman made a desperate effort to wrest the lead from Tearaway. Both jockeys and horses were straining every nerve to win. Talisman, so Murchison fancied, was watching Tearaway closely. From experience he had no doubt horses racing together watched each other quite as keenly as their riders. Talisman appeared to know he had the measure of Tearaway, and Murchison thought it best to let him run his own race. The jockey was almost as much interested in watching Talisman's movements as in keeping an

eye on Moss. If Talisman was going easily and well within himself, Murchison knew Moss was anything but at his ease.

The rider of Tearaway moved in his saddle and commenced to ride his mount hard. Talisman, evidently noting this movement, made his effort of his own free will, and just got his head in front.

They raced together head and head, and there was not more than a few inches between them. For the next few yards neither horse gained an advantage, and it seemed possible they would run a dead heat.

Murchison had, however, no desire to make a dead-heat of it; he meant to win. He had let Talisman have his own way up to now, but he knew the next few strides would settle the question, so he determined to make an effort.

Tearaway gained a momentary advantage, and this put Murchison on his mettle. He gave Talisman a 'reminder,' and the horse shot forward with a start, and before he had recovered from his surprise at such summary and unexpected treatment he had passed the post a neck in front of Tearaway. Murchison had 'struck home' exactly at the right time, not a moment too soon or too late. It was a judicious application of whip and spur, and it won the race. In the majority of cases whip and spur lose races, but applied exactly at the opportune moment in a close and critical finish they are invaluable.

Talisman had won, and this confirmed the New-market Handicap form, and Mark Mellish and Herbert Verney had an exceedingly good meeting.

Herbert Verney returned to Sydney by the express the same day, leaving Mark Mellish and Philip Thwaites in Melbourne.

Although he had been so successful at Flemington, he was suffering from a feeling of depression as he sat in the train as it sped on towards Albury. He was subject to these fits of depression at times, and therefore did not think seriously of his somewhat melancholy mood. Instead of a victor returning with the spoils of war, he seemed to be suffering from a defeat.

Two or three people in the carriage, who knew him by sight, thought he took his good fortune mournfully. Had they been similarly situated, their conduct would probably have bordered on the riotous.

At Albury Herbert changed into the Sydney express, in which he had secured a sleeping-berth. He 'turned in' as soon as the train left Albury, and quickly fell asleep. He did not, however, sleep long. He was never a sound sleeper when in the train, and a railway-carriage berth is not the most comfortable couch in the universe to the man who passes a restless night.

He tossed about and gave expression to his feelings, which roused the ire of the passenger in the

'bunk' overhead, who intimated that it would be more conducive to his comfort if Herbert would 'try and keep quiet and not go on groaning and moaning like a southerly buster.'

The rebuke being just and well merited, Herbert Verney forbore to reply, but he continued to toss about uneasily. A sense of something unpleasant about to happen was ever present with him, and he could not shake off the feeling. What that something was he could not imagine. He was anxious to reach Sydney and see if all was well with Olive.

There could be no cause for alarm about her, because he had received bright, cheerful letters from her in Melbourne.

He was glad when morning came and the train halted at breakfast-time. He made a hearty meal, for his restless night had made him hungry, and afterwards felt more satisfied with himself and things in general. He even went so far as to try and propitiate the passenger who had remonstrated with him the night before.

'You were deuced restless,' he said ; 'but it was probably more unpleasant for you than it was for myself.'

Herbert acknowledged the night had not been a dream of pleasure.

'There is one advantage a commercial traveller possesses,' was the reply to Herbert's remark, 'and

that is, he can generally sleep anywhere and under any circumstances.'

'Are you a commercial?'

'I am.'

'In what line?'

'Whisky. Try some,' and he opened a bag and took out a bottle. 'I can generally dispose of my samples,' he added with a humorous smile.

'Probably,' laughed Herbert; 'and this is not a bad sample by any means.'

CHAPTER XXVII

HERBERT VERNEY'S SUSPICIONS

THE arrangements for the marriage of Herbert Verney and Olive Thwaites were completed, and there was to be no unnecessary delay.

Herbert Verney had overcome his mother's objections to the match, but it had taken him some considerable time to accomplish it. Mrs. Verney liked Olive, but thought her son ought to have made a better match.

Herbert, however, protested against this, and said Olive was fitted to be the wife of any man, no matter how high his station in life might be.

They were constantly together now, and the more Herbert saw of Olive the greater was his confidence

in her, and he knew she was the one girl who would be suitable for his wife.

Olive was very happy, and her happiness was reflected in her face. Mrs. Thwaites brightened up under Olive's spell and looked eagerly forward to the marriage, although with certain misgivings. She could not entirely banish from her mind that conversation between her husband and father which she accidentally overheard in Bathurst. She wished she could take as hopeful a view of it as Mark Mellish, but that was impossible.

Olive's present from her father burnt a hole in her pocket, and she made up her mind to give Herbert Verney the ring when next he called. She had not long to wait for an opportunity, for Herbert called almost every day.

'I have a small present for you,' said Olive; 'I wish you to wear it for my sake.'

'I shall be delighted to do so,' replied Herbert, 'and am feverishly anxious to see what it is.'

'I hope you will not be disappointed,' said Olive with a smile. 'It is a ring, and I flatter myself a very handsome one, and there are not many like it.'

She handed him the case and eagerly watched him as he opened it. She was certain he would be delighted with such a ring, he could not fail to be so.

Herbert Verney opened the case and saw a massive plain gold ring. He looked at it curiously at first, and then Olive noticed his face gradually assumed

an ashen-gray paleness, and his hands trembled as he held it. He did not speak or show any pleasure at her gift, and she felt hurt.

Herbert Verney was struggling hard to keep his feelings under control. He fancied he had seen this ring before, and that it was the one stolen from his uncle's safe. He dare not take it out of the case and examine the marks, for fear his suspicion would be realized. It was Olive's gift, and therefore it could not possibly be the ring he thought it was, and yet how like it; and his eyes fastened upon it with a fascinated horror.

'Why do you not take it out of the case?' asked Olive in a piqued tone of voice. 'Is my little present not acceptable?'

Her voice recalled him to his senses. He must not let her suspect anything, or do anything to cause her pain.

'It is very handsome, Olive,' he said, 'and I have been admiring it so much that I did not like to take it out of the case.'

She was satisfied with his reply, and said:

'Take it out and put it on at once, you naughty boy.'

He took the ring out of the case and slipped it on his finger, and the gold seemed to burn into his flesh.

'I am sure it looks very handsome,' she said, taking his hand and examining the ring critically. 'Have you ever seen a more massive ring?'

‘No, I do not think I have,’ he said with an effort.
‘Where did you buy it?’

‘Father bought it, and gave it me. He thought I should like to make you a present.’

Herbert Verney shuddered, and Olive said in an alarmed voice:

‘Are you unwell? You look pale and tired. What is the matter, Herbert?’ and she put her arm round his neck and kissed him.

He felt stifled. He wished to be alone—alone, so that he could examine the ring and ascertain if his fears were correct.

‘I do not feel very well, Olive,’ he replied. ‘I think I will go home and call again later. I thank you very much for the ring, dear; it was very good of you to think of me.’

‘I must not take all the credit to myself,’ she replied. ‘It was father who bought the ring.’

‘But you gave it me, and I shall never forget that—never.’

He spoke in a strange tone of voice, utterly unlike his ordinary speech, and Olive became more alarmed.

‘You had better remain here,’ she said anxiously. ‘I am sure you are ill. Lie down on the couch and rest.’

‘No, no,’ he said impatiently; ‘I must go. Please let me go, Olive—it is nothing. I feel queer, nothing more, and it will soon pass off.’

‘Of course you are at liberty to do as you wish,’

she said sharply ; ' but I think you might remain when I ask you.'

He knew she must think his conduct strange, but he could not help it. He wanted to be alone, so that he could think the matter out.

In an absent-minded way he kissed her, and said he would call again later on.

Poor Olive ! When he had gone she sat down on the sofa and burst into tears. What was the matter with Herbert ? He did not seem at all pleased with her present, and she had looked forward with such delight to giving it to him. She felt crushed and bruised, and Herbert's was the hand that had dealt her the blow.

With an effort she stifled her sobs, and thought :

' He did not look well. Perhaps he is going to be very ill. Oh, why did he not stay here ! I would have nursed him and made him well. He must be ill, or he would never have spoken to me as he did. If he does not come this afternoon, I must go and see him—I could not bear to remain in suspense. I wish I had kept the ring until we were married. First intentions are generally the best.'

Herbert Verney arrived home, and went straight to his room and locked himself in. He felt he was about to make a discovery, the consequences of which he could not at present foresee ; but it overshadowed him, and presaged coming calamity. He twisted the ring on his finger.

‘A plain gold ring,’ he said to himself. ‘There are hundreds of them. Why should this one seem so different to the others?’

He was unwilling to take it off, and after drawing it half-way up his finger, pushed it back again.

‘Strange I should think it was my uncle’s ring, as soon as I saw it in the case!’ he said. ‘I may as well learn the worst,’ and he drew it off his finger.

Carefully he examined the markings on the outside. There was a crown, a number—28—and an anchor. He looked closely at the crown, and underneath he saw a very small v, so small that anyone who did not expect to find the letter there would not have noticed it.

The ring dropped from his hand, and rolled under the table. His thoughts, as he looked at that small tell-tale v, had given him a terrible shock.

Olive had given him the ring, and Olive’s father had given it to her. Where did Philip Thwaites get it? He could not have bought it, as he had stated to Olive. Where did he obtain possession of it, and *how*?

Herbert Verney recalled the visit of Mrs. Thwaites to The Fells. It came before him now with meaning vividness. He recollected her anxiety and agitation, her troubled looks, and her earnest pleading for him to give up Olive, and break off the engagement.

‘What was the reason of that visit, and her strange request?’ he asked himself.

Why did Mrs. Thwaites come to The Fells alone?

He dared not give utterance to his thoughts; they were too terrible, too fatal to all chances of happiness.

There could only be one reason why Mrs. Thwaites had so earnestly desired to break off the engagement. She must have known *how* her husband came into possession of the ring; or, if she did not know that, she must have learned the truth about what happened to John Verney at The Fells.

Herbert Verney recalled the absolute horror upon Mrs. Thwaites' face as she spoke of his engagement with Olive. He understood it now, and the situation in which he found himself placed was unbearable.

Philip Thwaites could only have obtained possession of the ring in one way. Herbert Verney knew his uncle always kept it locked in his safe. In that safe were £500 and some sovereigns, besides the ring. The money and the ring were missing, had been stolen, and by a strange fatality the girl he loved, Olive Thwaites, had given him his uncle's ring as a token of her love, and as a wedding gift.

It was all plain to him now, and he would have to act. The step he proposed taking would wreck Olive's happiness and his own, and cast a deep, settled gloom over their future lives.

Herbert Verney was fully convinced Philip Thwaites

must have had a hand in John Verney's death. What part he played in the tragedy would be disclosed later on. Philip Thwaites owed John Verney money, and Herbert knew his uncle was a hard man to such an one as Philip Thwaites. He argued that it was probable Olive's father had gone to see John Verney about his mortgage, that words had passed between them which probably led to blows, and then the end.

Mrs. Thwaites must have discovered what her husband had done, and, like an honest woman, she had dreaded a marriage between himself and Olive.

And Mark Mellish, what of him? To Mark attached the blame of having decided in favour of a continuance of the engagement. Mark must have heard the whole shocking story from Mrs. Thwaites, and after such damning evidence had advised that the engagement should not be broken off.

Words were not strong enough to condemn such conduct. Mark Mellish had made matters ten times worse than they would otherwise have been. The engagement between himself and Olive ought to have been ended at once, not allowed to continue until it meant the ruin of their happiness to break it off. What motive had Mark for giving Mrs. Thwaites such baneful advice?

Herbert Verney had worked himself up into such a frame of mind that he could not think clearly upon the question. The shock of the discovery he had

made proved too much for him, and he was in such an unreasonable state that he was prepared to hurl accusations right and left, careless where they hit.

He knew Mark Mellish was once deeply in love with Olive's mother, and no doubt he had acted as he did to spare her pain. That was all very well on Mark's part, but what about himself and Olive? Was it fair to keep them in the dark, and allow their engagement to go on? Decidedly, Mark had not acted as a friend, and he had trusted him implicitly.

A man in Herbert Verney's state cannot be held responsible for the wildly extravagant ideas which circulate through his brain at such moments. He worked himself up to such a pitch that he determined to call and see Mrs. Thwaites, and learn the truth from her. He would do nothing rash, and he meant to make sure of his ground before accusing Philip Thwaites. He never gave a thought to the fact that, in demanding an explanation from Mrs. Thwaites, he would be guilty of making the wife accuse her husband of a crime. He wanted the truth, and was determined to get it; and if Philip Thwaites was the guilty man, let him beware. True, the man he suspected was Olive's father, but he had sworn to track his uncle's assassin down, and he would show no mercy, no, not even to Olive's father.

He picked up the ring, and put it in his pocket. He meant to surprise Mrs. Thwaites into a confession before she was aware of it. He would be

able to tell from her face whether Philip Thwaites was the guilty man he thought him.

How to see Mrs. Thwaites without Olive being aware of his presence? This he knew was difficult, and the only chance of accomplishing what he wished was to watch Olive leave the house and then call.

During the afternoon he went out and proceeded towards Philip Thwaites' house. Fortune favoured him, for he had no sooner reached a spot where he could watch the door than he saw Olive come out.

'And she expected me to call this afternoon,' he grumbled to himself. 'She cannot care much about me, or she would have remained at home.'

He little thought that Olive, no longer able to bear the anxiety of suspecting him to be ill, had gone out to call and ask after him. He knocked at the door, and was admitted.

Mrs. Thwaites came into the room, and said :

'Olive has just left the house. It is strange you did not meet her. I am sure she would not have gone out had she expected you.'

'I am glad she is out. I came to see you,' was Herbert Verney's unexpected and—to Mrs. Thwaites—alarming answer.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A TIMELY EXPLANATION

MRS. THWAITES looked at Herbert Verney, and he saw fear in her eyes. Why did she dread an interview with him?

‘Have you seen this?’ he asked, as he handed her the ring.

Mrs. Thwaites felt relieved, but wondered why he asked her such a question.

‘Yes, I have seen it before,’ she said, smiling faintly. ‘Olive has given it you, then. She intended to keep it until you were married, and then surprise you with it. I expect she changed her mind.’

Why did she think of waiting until they were married? he thought. It was fortunate she had not done so.

‘I believe your husband gave Olive this ring?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you know where he obtained it?’

‘No.’

‘He bought it—so Olive told me.’

‘Oh, of course he bought it, but I do not know where.’

‘Mrs. Thwaites, your husband did not buy that ring,’ said Herbert.

She looked at him in a startled way ; there was evidently some hidden meaning in what he said.

‘ Did not buy it ! What do you mean ? ’ she asked anxiously.

‘ That ring was stolen,’ went on Herbert Verney, and Mrs. Thwaites shuddered, as she said in a hollow voice :

‘ Stolen ! How do you know it was stolen ? ’

‘ Because it belonged to my uncle, John Verney, and it was in his safe the night he was found dead ’ —he did not like to say ‘ murdered ’ to her.

‘ My God ! ’ exclaimed the unhappy woman, and then sank back in her chair exhausted.

Herbert Verney watched her, and his heart felt sad, for he was certain now of her husband’s guilt. He must know the worst, however, and he could not spare her.

‘ Look at that ring,’ he said. ‘ On the inside, beneath the crown, you will see a small v. My uncle once pointed this out to me. I am very sorry for you, but there can be no doubt about this ring having been my uncle’s property. How did it come into your husband’s possession ? ’

‘ I do not know,’ wailed Mrs. Thwaites.

‘ But you do know the reason you wished to break off the engagement between Olive and myself. I must know the whole truth, and why you visited The Fells for that purpose,’ he said.

‘ I cannot tell you,’ she said in a low voice.

‘You must tell me,’ he said. ‘I have the right to ask you.’

‘I dare not tell you.’

‘Then I shall place this ring in the hands of the police, and give them all the information I can,’ he answered.

This roused Mrs. Thwaites. She sat up in her chair, and looking at him fixedly, said :

‘Do you love Olive?’

‘You know I love her. I shall never love another woman,’ he replied.

‘Then for Olive’s sake I ask you to take no further step in the matter.’

‘I cannot promise that, even for Olive’s sake,’ he said.

‘Then you do not know what love is,’ she said sadly.

‘I would do anything to spare Olive pain.’

‘Then do not try and learn more about this matter.’

‘I must. Tell me why you came to The Fells.’

‘And if I do, will you promise to keep it a secret?’

‘No ; I cannot do that.’

‘Then I shall remain silent.’

‘As you please,’ replied Herbert Verney, as he rose to leave.

‘Where are you going?’

‘To give information to the police.’

‘You shall not,’ said Mrs. Thwaites, as she went swiftly to the door, locked it, and put the key in her pocket.

Herbert Verney smiled as he said :

‘I can wait until you let me out. Believe me, Mrs. Thwaites, it will be for the best to tell me all you know.’

‘All I know about what?’ she asked.

‘The death of my uncle,’ he said.

He saw her shudder and turn pale, and noted this as further evidence of the guilt of Philip Thwaites.

‘I know nothing of your uncle’s death,’ she said.

‘Pardon me; I think you do,’ he answered. ‘And I think I know the reason you wished to prevent a marriage between Olive and myself. In that you were right. Mark Mellish is much to blame for giving you bad advice. He did not act in a friendly way towards either of us.’

‘Mark Mellish acted for the best; he has more mercy than you, Herbert Verney,’ she answered.

‘I am sorry to give you pain,’ he replied, ‘but I must do my duty.’

‘You place duty before love?’

‘Yes,’ he answered in a hard voice.

‘And Olive must be sacrificed, her young life ruined, her happiness ruthlessly snatched from her?’ said Mrs. Thwaites.

‘Tell me all you know, and let me judge what is best to be done,’ he answered.

Mrs. Thwaites saw no way out of the difficulty, so she replied :

‘I will tell you all I know, and then be merciful. Think what I have suffered!’

‘I will,’ he answered, ‘and I will not act hastily.’

Then Ada Thwaites told him the story she had related to Mark Mellish at The Fells. She laid special stress upon her husband’s denial of any complicity in the death of John Verney. She pointed out the force of his statement that he dare not come forward at the inquest, and that Mark Mellish believed her husband’s story to be true. She spoke convincingly, and Herbert Verney was inclined to believe Philip Thwaites’ story; he wished to do so if possible, for Olive’s sake. But there was the fatal evidence of the ring. How did it come into his possession? That was a question difficult to answer.

Mrs. Thwaites had just finished her story when there was a knock at the front-door, and then the voices of Olive and Mark Mellish were heard.

Mrs. Thwaites hastily unlocked the door and then returned to her seat.

Mark Mellish met Olive soon after she had called at Mrs. Verney’s, and finding Herbert was not at home, had walked back with her.

‘Here you are, Herbert!’ said Olive as she entered the room, and then, noticing her mother’s agitation, she said:

‘You look dreadfully ill. What is the matter?’

Mrs. Thwaites looked helplessly at Herbert Verney, who replied:

‘Your mother did not seem well when I came in, so I remained with her. I expected to find you at home.’

Olive blushed as she said :

‘You were so unwell this morning that I could not rest, so I went round to your mother’s to inquire after you. When I found you were out, I guessed you were here, so came straight back.’

Herbert’s conscience smote him for thinking she had gone out because she did not consider it worth while remaining in to see him.

‘And I met Olive and escorted her home,’ said Mark, who saw that something had gone wrong between Mrs. Thwaites and Herbert.

‘You are the very man I wanted to see,’ replied Herbert, controlling his feelings, ‘and I will walk back with you.’

‘Are you going now?’ asked Olive disappointedly.

‘I am sorry I have to leave you,’ replied Herbert. ‘I called to tell you I had an engagement of importance this afternoon.’

With this Olive had to be contented, but she thought Herbert was in a strange mood, and utterly unlike his ordinary self.

‘Has anything unpleasant happened?’ asked Mark.

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Because you both looked horribly nervous when we came in,’ he replied.

‘I have learned from Mrs. Thwaites why she called

at The Fells to try and break off our engagement,' said Herbert.

They were walking through the Park, and Mark stopped, he was so surprised.

'You seem astonished,' said Herbert.

'I am.'

'No doubt,' he replied. 'I don't think you acted in a friendly manner when you advised Mrs. Thwaites to make no further objection to my engagement to Olive.'

'I do not think Philip Thwaites had a hand in your uncle's death,' said Mark. 'I believe his story.'

'I do not believe it,' said Herbert.

'What reason have you for doubting it?'

Herbert Verney looked at Mark steadily, and said :

'I always thought you were my friend, and I could depend upon you.'

'Surely you have not changed your opinion?' said Mark in surprise.

'I do not think you acted as my friend when you gave Mrs. Thwaites the advice upon which she acted at The Fells,' said Herbert.

'I did it for the best. I believe it is for the best, now.'

'Mark,' said Herbert earnestly. 'I hate to mistrust you.'

'You have no cause to do so,' said Mark.

They had now reached Mark's shop in Pitt Street, and went into the private room.

‘Have you any idea where this came from?’ said Herbert, showing him the ring.

‘Oh, yes,’ was Mark’s unexpected reply. ‘Philip Thwaites gave it to Olive. I knew it was intended for you.’

‘Indeed!’ said Herbert. ‘Did Thwaites tell you so?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you know where this ring came from? to whom it belonged?’ asked Herbert.

‘I know the man Philip Thwaites bought it from,’ said Mark. ‘I had my doubts how he came by it, and told Thwaites so.’

Herbert clutched Mark by the arm, and said, excitedly :

‘Then Philip Thwaites did buy the ring?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thank Heaven for that!’ said Herbert fervently. ‘You have lifted a dead weight off my shoulders, Mark; forgive me for saying what I did.’

‘That’s easily done,’ replied Mark. ‘I know you did not mean to mistrust me.’

‘Do you know to whom this ring belonged?’ asked Herbert.

‘No.’

‘It was my uncle’s, and it was in his safe the night he was murdered,’ said Herbert.

Mark Mellish was staggered at this, and well he might be.

‘I recollect your telling me about a ring,’ he answered.

‘Look at it carefully,’ said Herbert, ‘and you will see a small v under the crown.’

Mark examined it and said :

‘It is there, sure enough. What an extraordinary thing it should come into your possession in this way ! Is that why you went to see Mrs. Thwaites ?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you told her about this ring ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Poor woman ! no wonder she was agitated,’ said Mark sadly. ‘She has enough to bear without this.’

‘I told her the ring belonged to my uncle, and I made her tell me the reason she came to The Fells to try and break off the engagement,’ said Herbert.

‘She will believe her husband is guilty,’ said Mark.

‘And do not you think so ?’

‘No, I am certain he is not now, because I can lay my hand on the guilty man.’

‘You can !’ exclaimed Herbert excitedly. ‘Who is he ?’

‘The man who sold that ring to Philip Thwaites,’ said Mark.

‘And his name ?’

‘Charles Devereux.’

It was Herbert Verney’s turn to be astonished now.

‘How did it come into his possession ?’ he asked.

‘That we must try and discover. Devereux sold the ring to Philip Thwaites for ten pounds,’ said Mark. ‘I think you ought to see Mrs. Thwaites without delay and set her mind at ease.’

‘I will,’ said Herbert; ‘but what about Devereux?’

‘He has not yet returned from Melbourne,’ said Mark. ‘He will suspect nothing. The mystery is why he sold the ring, which is such a damning piece of evidence against him.’

‘He sold it because he thought, being of plain gold, it would not be recognised or identified,’ said Herbert. ‘No one would notice the private mark inside unless it was pointed out to him.’

‘I certainly should not have noticed it,’ said Mark.

‘What shall we do about Devereux?’ asked Herbert.

‘Leave that to me,’ said Mark.

‘You will not let him escape?’ said Herbert.

‘He will not try to escape, for he believes he is perfectly safe,’ replied Mark.

‘That is true,’ said Herbert. ‘Mark, you are always doing good actions. I ought to be ashamed of myself for doubting you.’

‘We’ll not talk about that,’ said Mark. ‘It was quite a misunderstanding. I know how you felt when you heard Mrs. Thwaites’ story.’

Herbert Verney saw Mrs. Thwaites, and told her what had passed between himself and Mark.

‘Mark was always my best friend,’ she said. ‘I shall never be able to repay him.’

Herbert Verney spent the evening with Olive, and she was delighted to find he had recovered his spirits, and was in the best of humours.

‘I thought you were tired of me,’ she said with a smile.

‘Tired of you, Olive?’ he replied. ‘We shall live happily together, I hope, for many years, and never become tired of each other.’

‘I am sure we shall be very happy,’ she replied.

CHAPTER XXIX

TWO CONFESSIONS

‘SERIOUS accident in Melbourne.’

Mark Mellish was glancing over the *Morning Herald*, when he caught sight of this heading. He looked down the column carelessly until his attention was arrested by the name Charles Devereux.

‘Wonder what he has been up to,’ thought Mark.

He read the account, and was surprised to find Charles Devereux was not the cause of the serious accident, but the victim.

It appeared that Devereux was attempting to get into the Sydney express at Spencer Street Station, as the train was on the move, when his foot slipped and he fell heavily on to the platform, striking his

head violently against the corner of a porter's truck. It was a peculiar accident. Devereux's legs appeared to have been bent and twisted under him, and both were broken. His head caught the iron-bound corner of the truck, striking him on the temple and rendering him insensible. He was at once taken to the hospital, and the doctors gave very little hope of his recovery.

Mark had just finished reading the paragraph, when a telegram was handed to him, and on opening it he found, by a strange coincidence, it was from Charles Devereux.

‘Wish to see you and Herbert Verney immediately. Important communication. Am dying.’

‘He wants to confess about the murder at The Fells,’ thought Mark, and he went out in search of Herbert Verney. By the express the same night they travelled to Melbourne, and arrived there before noon the next day.

They drove to the hospital, and on making inquiries for Devereux, learned there was no hope of his recovery, and that he had been constantly inquiring for them.

‘Poor beggar!’ said Mark; ‘he’s paying the penalty, at any rate.’

They were conducted to Charles Devereux’s bedside without delay. He was evidently suffering intense pain and was a pitiable object.

‘I am glad you have come,’ said Devereux in a stifled voice, ‘for I have something to tell you, Herbert Verney, and I thought it better there should be a witness. Please ask the doctor to give me something to keep up my strength until I have finished my story.’

The house surgeon attended to his wants and then Devereux continued :

‘I knew your uncle, John Verney, well, and worked for him, finding out information about the people he wished to lend money to.’

This statement surprised Herbert Verney, for he had never heard his uncle mention Devereux’s name.

‘It is quite true,’ he went on in a laboured voice, ‘and I wish I had never met him.’

He then explained what occurred at The Fells the night of John Verney’s death.

‘He was not murdered,’ said Devereux ; ‘as I am a dying man, I swear it. He suffered from heart-disease, and that caused his death. Dr. Selhurst was quite right in his surmise as to how the wrists were cut. When I read the evidence I was surprised at his accuracy. There was a large knife, of Indian make, it seemed to me, on the desk, and as John Verney fell, he placed his hand on the knife. This action must have turned the blade edgeways, and he let both wrists fall upon it.

‘You can imagine my horror when I saw what had happened, and the blood pouring from those gashes

on his wrists. I naturally thought of the situation in which I should be placed if anyone found me there.'

He then described how he got Hereward out of the box, and how the horse took fright and bolted down the road.

'That is the true story of your uncle's death,' he said to Herbert. 'No murder was done. He died from heart-disease.'

'Brought to a fatal termination by his quarrel with you,' said Herbert. 'You are morally responsible for his death.'

'I have been a bad lot, Mr. Verney,' said Devereux, 'and deserve very little pity, but I do not think you ought to make such an accusation against me now I am dying.'

'I am sorry to see you in such a sad plight,' said Mark.

'I believe you are,' said Devereux with a wan smile. 'You never bear ill-feeling against anyone for very long. There ought to be more like you in the world.'

'There are one or two questions I wish to ask you,' said Herbert.

'I will answer any question you put to me, if I can.'

Herbert Verney showed Charles Devereux the ring he had sold to Philip Thwaites, and said :

'Do you recognise this ?

'Yes ; I sold it to Philip Thwaites. He told me it

would come into your possession, and at first I was rather afraid of the consequences that might follow.'

'Where did you get it from?'

'I took it out of your uncle's safe,' said Devereux.

'After his death?'

'Yes.'

'There was no struggle between my uncle and yourself?' asked Herbert. 'You did not attempt to rob him?'

'No, I did not; but when he was dead and I saw the safe open, the temptation was too great. Your uncle had promised me five hundred pounds, so I thought he must have it in the safe,' said Devereux.

'Did you take that amount?'

'No. I found a small bag of sovereigns and that ring, but no notes.'

'Yet the money was in the safe. I know that from my uncle's papers, and he always had that amount by him,' said Herbert.

'There were several papers in the safe,' said Devereux, gasping for breath painfully, 'but I fancied I heard someone coming, and hurried away.'

'Then the money must have been taken by someone else,' said Herbert.

'That may have been,' replied Devereux.

Herbert Verney and Mark Mellish looked at each other. The same thought occurred to them both: Philip Thwaites might have found the safe open and been unable to resist the temptation.

‘Did you not think this ring might get Philip Thwaites into serious difficulties?’ asked Herbert.

‘Never gave it a thought, and I was hard up when I parted with it. There are so many plain gold rings. How did you recognise it?’

Herbert Verney explained how he recognised the ring, and Devereux said :

‘I always thought that ring would get me into trouble, and yet I did not throw it away.’

They saw he was exhausted, and left him, and it was the kindest thing they could do. Charles Devereux died before they arrived in Sydney again.

‘I must have it out with Philip Thwaites,’ said Herbert. ‘I will learn the truth about that night. If he corroborates Devereux’s statement, we will keep it a secret, Mark, because if there was no foul play, there is no justice to be done.’

‘I think Philip Thwaites will be severely punished when he has to confess to you,’ said Mark.

‘He deserves to be punished,’ replied Herbert.

In this Mark acquiesced, and in his heart he was glad that Mrs. Thwaites would not have to bear all the burden of her husband’s guilt.

Philip Thwaites had no idea what Herbert Verney’s visit to him was about. He concluded he had called in reference to his marriage with Olive.

They were alone in the room in which Herbert Verney had his interview with Mrs. Thwaites, and

Olive and her mother were out. First of all Herbert Verney gave Philip Thwaites an account of the story he had heard from Charles Devereux.

Philip Thwaites was amazed and alarmed, and wondered what Herbert Verney would say next.

‘He knows nothing about my visit to The Fells,’ thought Philip, with a feeling of relief.

Herbert’s next question, however, made Philip Thwaites quake in his shoes, and he was almost too frightened to answer him.

‘What were you doing at The Fells the night of my uncle’s death?’ asked Herbert harshly.

Philip Thwaites stammered a denial. The question had taken him completely by surprise.

‘You need not trouble to deny that you were there,’ said Herbert. ‘I know better, and I wish you to tell me the truth. It will be to your advantage to do so.’

‘I was at The Fells that night,’ said Philip, ‘but your uncle was dead when I entered the house.’

‘Explain how you found him, and in what position.’

This Philip Thwaites did, and his story tallied with Charles Devereux’s. Herbert Verney felt he was speaking the truth.

‘There was a large sum of money in the safe,’ said Herbert.

Philip Thwaites wished himself hundreds of miles away.

‘Did you open the safe?’ asked Herbert.

Philip Thwaites tried hard to be indignant at such an accusation, and failed miserably.

‘Tell me the truth, or it will be the worse for you,’ said Herbert.

Then Philip Thwaites confessed he had abstracted £500 from the safe. He tried to excuse himself by pleading the plight he was in at the time, and wound up by offering to refund the money.

‘I am glad you have told me the truth,’ said Herbert. ‘There is one thing you must do, or, rather, two things.’

‘And they are?’ asked Philip eagerly.

‘Give Olive five hundred pounds as a wedding present, and promise never to say a word about the affair at The Fells. The whole matter had better drop. It is an unpleasant business. I am very sorry for your wife, and we must take care Olive never hears one word about it.’

Philip Thwaites was only too ready to promise; he never expected to be let off so easily.

‘You must bear in mind,’ said Herbert, ‘that you are none the less guilty of a crime because it is hidden from the world. Your conduct was shameful, and you deserve to be punished by the law. Had you not been Olive’s father, I would not have spared you. I shall never forget what you have done, and there can be no friendship between us. I love Olive, and for her sake I will take no steps against you.’

Had my uncle met with foul play, nothing would have prevented me from doing my duty.'

Philip Thwaites was humbled and crushed, and felt Herbert Verney's rebuke keenly, none the less so because it was well deserved. He wondered how Herbert came to know of his visit to The Fells. He dared not question his wife on the subject, because by so doing she would learn that Herbert Verney knew all. He did not suspect for one moment that his wife had been forced to confess her secret and his crime.

He was glad Devereux was out of the way, and he remembered Mark's warning against him.

Mark Mellish thought it only just that Philip Thwaites should be made to suffer, and he added more to the load he had to bear when he gave Thwaites to understand that he knew all about his proceedings.

'And you knew this when you gave me a helping hand in Sydney?' said Philip Thwaites.

'Yes ; but I did it for the sake of your wife and daughter ; I have no respect for you, nor shall I change my opinion. You may consider yourself lucky no proceedings have been taken against you. I advise you to keep straight in the future, and also to be a little more considerate to those nearest to you.'

Philip Thwaites felt humiliated, and smarted under the knowledge that Herbert Verney and Mark

Mellish knew of what he had been capable. He deserved his punishment, which was perhaps more severe in the end than any the law would have given him. He determined to try and win back the good opinion he had lost, but he knew it would be a hard task.

Mrs. Thwaites noticed a change in him, and wondered at it; he had never been so attentive to her and careful of her comfort for many a long year. Happily she knew nothing about the £500 he had taken from John Verney's safe.

When Philip Thwaites gave Olive £500 before her marriage Mrs. Thwaites was astounded, not at his having the money, but at his unselfishness in parting with it. Such a proceeding had hitherto been utterly foreign to his nature.

'It will help to buy your trousseau,' he said to Olive, who was overwhelmed at his generosity.

'Help to buy it!' she said. 'You dear good father, it will more than suffice. I am not extravagant, and five hundred pounds is a lot of money.'

'I am only too pleased to give it you,' said her father, and he really meant it, for his action eased his conscience considerably. He even went so far as to delude himself into the belief that it was his own suggestion which prompted him to make Olive such a handsome present.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ROAR OF THE RING

HERBERT VERNEY and Olive Thwaites were quietly married in Randwick Church, and Mark Mellish acted as best man.

Mrs. Verney, Herbert's mother, quickly discovered her son had made no mistake in the choice of a wife, and she grew to regard Olive as a daughter.

Olive had a lovable disposition, and was determined to win her mother-in-law's goodwill, and succeeded. Herbert Verney was delighted, for he had been rather anxious about it. They spent the honeymoon amidst the enchanting scenery of the Blue Mountains, and a more idyllic spot could not have been selected.

They went on to Bathurst and saw Bob Insch, who had quite recovered himself, and was again doing a thriving business. Herbert ordered a special buggy to be built for Olive, and her grandfather promised it should be the best he had ever turned out.

'That is rather a tall order,' said Herbert.

'But it shall be carried out,' replied Bob, and he kept his word, for when the buggy was delivered in Sydney it was pronounced to be a masterpiece.

They went to The Fells, and Olive having expressed a desire to reside there during a portion of the year, Herbert gave instructions for everything to

be put in order, and in a few months' time the somewhat gloomy house looked spick and span and quite cheerful.

Olive was quite as enthusiastic over horses as her husband, and Herbert soon found out she was as good a judge as she was a rider.

When Olive rode along the road to Randwick, or went for a canter round the Centennial Park, she was the centre of attraction, and the men admired her, while the ladies envied her. She had a perfect seat on a horse, and was always well mounted. Sam Sandycroft was loud in his praises of young Mrs. Verney.

'She knows a horse when she sees one,' was Sam's comment. 'I'd trust her to pick out the best in any stable. Never saw a woman with such judgment before. It's marvellous. Where the deuce she got her knowledge from beats me. It must be a gift, for she couldn't have learned all she knows at Bathurst.'

Mrs. Sandycroft and Ruth were also charmed with Olive, and she and Ruth were firm friends.

'Ruth, you are a lucky girl,' said Olive one day, 'nearly as lucky as I am, but not quite—just a wee bit less lucky than I am.'

Ruth laughed as she replied :

'And when did you discover I was born under a lucky star ?'

'The first time I saw Mark Mellish talking to you.'

Ruth blushed, and said hesitatingly :

‘How can you be so absurd, Olive! What has Mark Mellish to do with my luck?’

‘A good deal, I should say, provided you give him a fair chance. If I am not very much mistaken, Mark is in love with my friend Ruth. Oh, you need not shake your head and deny all knowledge of the fact. I know the symptoms. Herbert showed them badly the very first time we were alone together, and Mark has developed an exactly similar complaint. He is a real good fellow, and you are, as I said before, a lucky girl.’

Olive was not wide of the mark in her conjecture. Mark Mellish was tired of leading a lonely life. He saw how happy Herbert Verney was with Olive, and he thought the best thing he could do would be to follow his example. He had always admired Ruth, and he first understood his real feelings towards her when he saw her looking over the sea-wall at Coogee Bay with Leo St. Rollox. A pang, which he attributed to jealousy, shot through him on that occasion, and he had not forgotten it. He was older than Ruth, considerably, but he was not too old to make her a good husband. When he propounded the question to Sam Sandycroft the trainer looked knowing, and said :

‘I’m not surprised, Mr. Mellish. I have seen this coming on for some time past. I have been through the mill twice and am not liable to make mistakes.’

‘What about Ruth?’ asked Mark. ‘Do you think there is any chance for me?’

‘You ask her,’ said the trainer. ‘It is a bigger certainty than Talisman was for the Newmarket. She’s sure to accept for that engagement, I’ll stake my life on it.’

‘Don’t be rash, Sam,’ laughed Mark, who was well pleased with the trainer’s reply.

‘There’s nothing rash about it. I wish I had as good a thing for the Melbourne Cup,’ said Sam.

Mark tried his luck, and Ruth gave him a favourable answer.

‘There, I told you so!’ said Olive when her friend imparted the information. ‘I knew I was not mistaken. Mark was too far gone for any mistake to be possible.’

Leo St. Rollox was not at all pleased when he heard of Ruth’s engagement to Mark Mellish, for he had not given up all hopes of carrying off the prize. However, he put the best face he could on it, and offered Mark his congratulations. The fact of the matter was, St. Rollox had been hard hit over the Melbourne meeting, and he knew the best way to make a recovery was to keep in with Mark Mellish.

Having made such a hit with Talisman, Herbert Verney was anxious to buy Tearaway, and Sam Sandycroft thought it would not be a bad deal.

St. Rollox did not want to sell his horse, but when

Sam made him an offer of £1,500 for him it was too good to refuse.

‘I’ll accept it,’ said St. Rollox ; ‘but you’ll find he is not dear, and I am sorry to part with him.’

Tearaway had proved himself on the racecourse nearly as good as Talisman, and when he had been in Sam’s hand a few months there was such an improvement in him that he beat Talisman in a trial.

‘I knew he was stale when he ran in the New-market,’ said Sam. ‘He is a ten-pound better horse now.’

Herbert Verney and Mark Mellish saw a chance of landing another big stake over Tearaway, and Sam was giving him a special preparation for the Metropolitan Stakes.

‘He’ll not get a big weight,’ said Sam, ‘because they think he can’t stay. He can stay all right, I have found that out, and I am not sure that staying is not his forte. At any rate, I’ll put him alongside Glen Innes over two miles ; that will settle the question ; but you need not be afraid that trial will come off before the weights are out.’

At the A. J. C. Spring Meeting at Randwick, Tearaway won the Metropolitan, much to the chagrin of St. Rollox, who called his trainer anything but a genius for not discovering Tearaway’s staying powers.

The following year was an eventful one for Olive. She persuaded her husband to let her ride The Gem at the Sydney Show.

‘I am sure he will win the jumping prize,’ she said, ‘as easily as he did at Bathurst.’

‘I don’t half like it,’ said Herbert. ‘You had much better let Fred Penistone ride him.’

‘We’ll ask Penistone what he thinks,’ said Olive.

The groom was duly consulted. There are not many men who will own up to the fact that a horse might possibly be better ridden than any one of them could do it. Fred Penistone was the exception to the rule.

‘If you’ll take my advice, sir,’ he said, ‘you will let Mrs. Verney ride him. No one can manage The Gem as well as she can. I don’t say but there might be a horse I could manage better than Mrs. Verney, but it would have to be a rum un, sir.’

Olive laughed heartily as she said :

‘That settles it, Herbert. You cannot refuse to let me ride The Gem after such an opinion.’

So Herbert Verney had to give in, and Olive rode The Gem at the show of the Agricultural Society at Moore Park.

The Gem did not belie the name he had earned for himself at Bathurst, nor did Olive disappoint the expectant crowd.

After a tough fight The Gem won, and there was no prouder man on the ground than Herbert Verney.

Philip Thwaites was a changed man, and ever since the day he had such a startling interview with Herbert Verney he had been much kinder to his

wife. Mrs. Thwaites appreciated the change, and although she could not forget all that had happened in the past, she tried to look upon the brighter side of life.

When she heard of Mark Mellish's engagement there was a pang of regret, for she knew he had at last forgotten his early love. She also knew it was for the best, and that it was useless for Mark to pass his life in lonely state because of an old love whose flame ought to be quenched.

Mark Mellish, the leviathan, the man who lived amidst the 'roar of the Ring,' was as much respected as ever, and his fortune was rapidly accumulating. It was said of Mark, and truly, that he had never done a mean action, or been guilty of anything approaching a dishonourable act.

He was a man who lived a life surrounded by temptations, and steered a straight course. Many men who professed to look down upon him because he was a bookmaker did not live uprightly, and their ideas of honesty would have been scorned by Mark Mellish. These men were always ready to have wagers with Mark Mellish, and some of them were not always punctual in their payments when they lost.

Mark Mellish knew that the financial positions of many men who lived extravagantly, and were received in the best society, from Government House downwards, were insecure. He was not a man to talk about other people's business. He saw men pass him in the

street with a supercilious nod of the head, and he knew these men were bankrupt in more senses than one ; their wealth was a sham, and their consciences were well under control. Mark Mellish bided his time. He toiled amidst the roar of the Ring, and he lived a clean, reputable life. There came a time when Mark Mellish was recognised at his true worth. It was when the bank smashes came, and panic raged throughout the city ; when bogus building societies and investment companies burst, and the money of the working men vanished into thin air ; when ruin stared honest toilers, who had been despoiled, in the face, and their hoardings were swallowed up in a vortex of criminal dishonesty on the part of directors and promoters. It availed the losers little when these craven hounds were cast into prison to serve a just and righteous sentence, and to be branded as criminals for evermore.

It was Mark Mellish who came forward and helped many a ruined man to get on to his feet again. He gave money—thousands of pounds—to the men who had been despoiled, and they blessed the king of the Ring, and cursed the despoilers who had looked down upon him. Many a working man's home did Mark save from the hands of the men who wished to claim it because, forsooth, the instalments were not paid.

And in his giving Mark Mellish was just, and only the deserving had a helping hand.

He had his reward when, on leaving for a trip to England, a banquet was given him, and Ministers of the colony, men of all shades of opinion and stations in life, assembled to do him honour because he was an honest man.

It should never be lost sight of that a man's calling is what he makes it. There are many Mark Mellishes to be found in the vast crowds that surge and battle amidst 'the roar of the Ring.'

THE END

NAT GOULD'S SPORTING NOVELS

Some Press Opinions.

THE OLD MARE'S FOAL. 'Mr. Gould has the happy knack of writing bracing and healthful stories of country life. In "The Old Mare's Foal" he has certainly written a book after his own heart, and a most readable and enjoyable one too. So friendly do we feel towards the author and his characters that we rejoice almost as keenly as they do in the triumphant career of Birdsgrove, who won the Triple Event and brought back Dame Fortune to the house of its owner.'—*St. James's Gazette*.

THE PACE THAT KILLS. 'All the characters are drawn with a firm hand; the training, trial, and racing chapters are capital; and the story as a whole stands forth as a neat piece of work. We know no racing novel of recent years with which "The Pace that Kills" need fear comparison.'—*Sportsman*.

THE DARK HORSE. 'Lovers of sport will find much to interest and amuse them in "The Dark Horse." Mr. Gould has made the Turf his particular study, and the result is that in his stories the details of racing therein are correctly portrayed. The book abounds in exciting situations and will no doubt be as popular as its predecessors from the same pen.'

Nottingham Guardian.

GOLDEN RUIN. 'This is one of the most finished of his sketchy stories. Cleverly wrought up to the climax.'—*The Times*.

THE MINERS' CUP. 'Is a stirring story brightly told and readable throughout.'—*Daily Telegraph*.

THE MAGPIE JACKET. 'A capital turf story from a well-practised pen.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

A GENTLEMAN RIDER. 'A singularly powerful piece of writing. In all respects a capital novel.'—*Scotsman*.

THE FAMOUS MATCH. 'As a racing novel this is capital reading the description of the Derby is spirited and realistic.'

Glasgow Herald.

HILLS AND DALES. 'A pretty story. brightly written, full of movement, and touches of pathos and humour.'

Pall Mall Gazette.

RACECOURSE AND BATTLEFIELD. 'Mr. Nat Gould has struck out for himself a new line of fiction which is likely to strengthen his hold upon the large body of readers to whom his pen brings delight a briskly told tale full of incident.'

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